

IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE IN LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON'S NOVEL *SPEAK*

Dwi Anggriani, M. Amrin Siregar

Faculty of Literature

Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara (UISU), Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: khajio10.youngzayn@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper discusses the impacts of sexual abuse found in the novel *Speak* that has been selected as the source of data because this novel has a strong impact on sexual abuse victim. The story is about a female teenager who becomes a victim of abuse and it gives her many impacts. The aims of this study are to find out and analyze the impacts of sexual abuse and is conducted based on the concept of sexual abuse, a crime related to sexuality and more specifically related to male and female sexuality. Sexual abuse can include sexual harassment and sexual assault. Sexual abuse is an act that can harm and damage the victims with physical, psychological, sexual and even emotional impacts. This study applies descriptive qualitative method, which collects the data taken from the novel that has been read. The result of the study shows that there are three forms of sexual abuse impacts: physical, psychological and behavioral.

Keywords: sexual abuse, impact, victim, harassment, violence

1. Introduction

Abuse or violence is common in everyday life both in the family, community and peers. Abuse generally affects people who are helpless. The case of abuse will never run out to be discussed over time. Generally, abuse often occurs on children or it is called child abuse. The problem of child abuse is not a stand-alone problem but is influenced by several interacting factors. Child abuse is also called child maltreatment, which is an action that is intentionally carried out, by a parent or caregiver.

Victims who experience sexual abuse will certainly experience of course very suffering physically, psychologically or emotionally and socially. The victims of criminal acts of sexual abuse often have adverse impacts such as depression, fear, anger, trauma, physical disability, guilt or shame, anxiety, interpersonal isolation, shame, low self-esteem, self-destructive behavior, poor body imagery, sleep disturbance, suicide, nightmares, anorexia or bulimia, criminality in adulthood, relational or sexual dysfunction, compulsive behavior like alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, over eating, over spending, and sexual obsession or compulsion.

Speak written by Laurie Halse Anderson tells about Melinda Sordino, a student at Merryweather High School in Syracuse, New York who becomes traumatized after she is raped in one party. In *Speak*, Melinda is raped by her senior and becomes his sexual pleasure but she is unable to tell everyone about the incident. After the sexual

abuse, she chooses not to speak with anyone else about what has really happened to her. *Speak* which raises the issues of rapes by portraying the situation nowadays intrigues the writer to analyze the impacts of sexual abuse in the novel.

Speak not only exposes how rape cases can happen in school environment but also shows how the victim becomes isolated from the society. The novel shows how Melinda Sordino, the victim, drastically changes into an outcast. Melinda's traumatic experience after sexually harassed causes psychological trauma to her, she becomes a mute; she refuses to talk to anyone. Melinda practically stops talking, and increasingly disconnects herself to events around her. Melinda begins to skip school, withdraws from her parents, and loses herself. She hides away in an abandoned janitor's closet during the school day, where she goes to sleep or hides when she is feeling anxious. Her only sanctuary is her art class, where there is a kind teacher who encourages her to express herself. The novel *Speak* is an American novel as the third novel written by Laurie Halse Anderson, which has won 8 awards and becomes one of 11 finalists of book awards such as Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year, A New York Time Best Seller, and many more.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sexual Abuse

According to Achie (2000), sexual abuse is a crime related to sexuality and more specifically related to male and female sexuality. Sexual abuse can include sexual harassment and sexual assault.

2.1.1 Sexual Abuse without Elements of Coercion

Sexual abuse without elements of coercion is conducted by persuasion or other actions by outsmarting victims generally due to limited experience and children's reasoning. The possibility of this crime happens is based and planned by the perpetrator whose victims are children. Beside children, women are possible to be victims of sexual abuse without any elements of coercion, such as sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is one type of sexual abuses. Sexual harassment refers to an act that is done by physical or non-physical touch with the aim of the sexual organ or sexuality of the victim. It includes whistling, flirting, sexual nuanced speech, displaying pornographic material and sexual desires, puffing or touching on parts of the body, sexual gestures that can cause discomfort, offense, and humiliation to the victim's self esteem.

2.1.2 Sexual Abuse with Elements of Coercion

Sexual abuse with elements of coercion has been regulated in Article 285 of the Penal Code that must meet the elements such as:

1. Abuse/threats of abuse.
2. The existence of intercourse with the victim.

One example of sexual abuse with elements of coercion is rape. Rape the most concerning abuse of sexual abuses with elements of coercion. Rape is an attack which is directed to the sexual part and sexuality of a person by using the perpetrator's sexual organ to the victim's sexual organs, like vagina, anus or mouth, or by using other body parts that are not sexual organs or other objects. The attacks are done violence by threatening with coercion resulting in fear of violence, under duress, psychological pressure or abuse of power or by taking advantage of a coercive environment, or assaults on a person.

2.2 Impacts of Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is an act that can harm and damage its victims. There are many impacts of sexual abuse, physically, psychologically, sexually, or even emotionally (Sanderson, 2006: 40).

2.2.1 Physical impacts

Physical impact may include a variety of physical problems that are sexually related, such as sexually transmitted diseases, problems with the throat or mouth, difficulties with urination, penile or vaginal discharge, or bruises in the genital area and stomachache (Zastrow, 2015: 246)

A person who is assaulted may sustain bruises and cuts. They could also have more severe injuries such as knife wounds, broken bones, and damaged genitals. Others may develop chronic pain without an obvious physical cause.

Some survivors experience sexual dysfunction, and fertility issues. Others may develop sexually transmitted infections. Contrary to myth, it is possible for a sexual assault to result in pregnancy.

2.2.2 Psychological Impacts

The psychological impacts of sexual abuse inflict or damage psychological part of the victims of sexual abuse. The psychological impacts are:

1. Depression: The loss of bodily autonomy is often difficult to cope with. It can create feelings of hopelessness or despair. It may also reduce one's sense of self-worth. Depressive feelings may be mild and fleeting, or they can be intense and long-lasting.
2. Anxiety: The loss of bodily autonomy can also cause severe anxiety. Survivors may fear the attack could happen again. Some may experience panic attacks. Others may develop agoraphobia and become afraid to leave their homes. In some cases, a survivor may develop a chronic fear of the type of person who harms them.
3. Post-traumatic stress: Abuse at an early age can have enduring negative effects on a child's brain development and function. Stress sculpts the brain to exhibit various antisocial.

2.2.3 Behavioral Impacts

Sexual abuse can sometimes result in personality disruptions such as borderline personality. The behavior linked with personality disruptions could actually be an adaption to abuse. For instance, a characteristic of borderline personality is a fear of abandonment. That fear might not be adaptive in adulthood. Yet avoiding abandonment might have protected someone from sexual abuse as a child.

3. Research Method

Research design is a framework that has been created to find out the answers of research questions. Moleong (2007) defines a research design as the researcher's overall concepts for answering the research question or testing the research hypothesis.

This study adopts descriptive qualitative method. Sukmadinata (2006), explains that descriptive research is a form of research aimed at describing existing phenomena, both natural phenomena and man-made phenomena. Moleong (2007) states that qualitative research is research that intends to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the subject of research such as behavior, perception, motivation, action,

etc. in a holistic manner, and by way of descriptions in the form of words and language, in a context specifically natural and by utilizing various natural methods.

In addition, the writer also collects the data from some books, internet and many other resources that can be related to the subject matter being analyzed, attending to the steps of collecting, selecting, interpreting the data and finally creating the conclusion.

4. Discussion

4.1 Sexual Abuse

Melinda is raped by Andy Evans, "I was on the ground and he was on top of me... he smells like beer and mean and he hurts me and gets up and zips his jeans and smiles. (Anderson, 1999: 135). It is seen that a sexual abuse has been done by Andy Evans to Melinda Sordino. Melinda is actually an ordinary girl who has many friends. However, in her mind, though she has many friends, it is still not complete without someone who loves her. She wants and needs someone to be loved. That is why she wants to join the party invited by her best friend, Rachel.

Of course, she has done the wrong thing in making her intention to get a boyfriend in the party. She has already consumed some glasses of beer and after that she becomes drunk and also causes her to be sexually abused. She is even raped by Andy. This can be proved through the quotation below.

I'm hanging a poster outside the metal-shop room when IT creeps up.
Little flecks of metal slice through my veins. IT whispers to me.
"fresh meat". That's what IT whispers. IT found me again. I thought I
could ignore IT. There are four hundred other freshmen in here, two
hundred female. Plus all the other grades. But he whispers to me
(Anderson, 1999: 86).

Some days later, Andy Evans tries to rape Melinda again along with physical abuse in Melinda's special room in school. Andy Evans punches Melinda for struggling to refuse him to rape her again. It happens after she tells the truth to her friend about the one who rapes her that night in the party. This can be proved through the quotation below.

His mouth is on my face. I pull my arms again and he slams his body
against mine. I have no legs. My heart wobbles. His teeth are on my
neck. The only sound I can make is a whimper. He fumbles to hold
both my wrists in one hand.....No. A sound explodes from me.
"NNNOOO!!!".....He curses and turns, his fist coming, coming. An
explosion in my head and blood in my mouth. He hit me. I scream,
scream (Anderson, 1999: 194).

The above quotation is the proof that there is a sexual abuse that has been undergone by Melinda.

4.1.1 Physical Impact

The first and worst impacts that are caused by the sexual abuse on Melinda Sordino is that she loses her virginity because she is raped by Andy Evans. It is, of course, impossible if a woman raped does not lose her virginity. This can be shown by the quotation below.

“If my life were a TV show, what would it be? If it were an After-School Special, I would speak in front of an auditorium of my peers on How Not to Lose Your Virginity. Or, Why Seniors Should Be Locked Up. Or, My Summer Vacation: A Drunken Party, Lies, and Rape... Was I raped?” (Anderson, 1999: 164).

As other physical impacts of sexual abuse, Melinda often undergoes unclear feelings of pain such as headache, stomachache, or even throat ache. Sometimes, she feels that there is a problem with her stomach, sometimes with her head, and sometimes with her throat.

Melinda also gets injured after Andy Evans punches her head when he tries to rape her again in her special room in school until blood comes of Melinda’s mouth. It must hurt her and makes head giddy and dizzy. However, she cannot do anything. The moment in which she is punched by Andy in her can be proved through the quotation below.

I follow the sound, pushing off the wall, pushing Andy Evans off-balance, stumbling into the broken sink. He curses and turns, his fist coming, coming. An explosion in my head and blood in my mouth. He hit me. I scream, scream (Anderson, 1999: 194).

4.1.2 Psychological impact

The second impact of sexual abuse is a psychological impact. The psychological impact of sexual abuse is that she prefers isolating herself from other people she knows and she does not know. She pulls herself from people and her environment. She prefers to be alone in a room than in a crowd. She has found an abandoned room in her school to be a place for her to pull herself from people and her environment. It is shown by the quotation below.

The back wall has built-in shelves filled with dusty text-books and a few bottles of bleach. A stained armchair and an old-fashioned desk peek from behind a collection of mops and brooms. A cracked mirror tilts over a sink littered with dead roaches crocheted together with cobwebs. The taps are so rusted they don’t turn. No janitor has chilled in this closet for a very long time. They have a new lounge and supply room by the loading dock. All the girls avoid it because of the way they stare and whistle softly when we walk by. This closet is abandoned, it has no purpose, no name, it is the perfect place for me (Anderson, 1999: 26).

She spends much time in the room she finds in school. By doing that, she feel more comfortable and safe than meets with other people.

Melinda feels that her life is worthless after she finds that a letter in her locker is not from a man who loves her, but from Heather, who returns her friendship necklace to her. This thing makes her restless and disappointed because Heather is her only closed friend who has always contacted her after she is raped. This can be shown through the quotation below.

I bend down to find what dropped from the card. It was the friendship necklace I had given Heather in a fit of insanity around Christmas. Stupid stupid stupid. How stupid could I be? I hear a cracking inside

me, my ribs are collapsing in on my lungs, which is why I can't breathe.....A half-forgotten holiday has unveiled every knife that sticks inside me, every cut. No Rachel, no Heather, not even a silly, geeky boy who would like the inside girl I think I am (Anderson, 1999: 110).

The above quotation constitutes the proof that describes she really feels lonesome, restless, and disappointed after knowing that her friend, Heather, returns her friendship necklace. Actually, she does not want it to happen because she realizes that Heather is her only friend who always makes a communication with her after the sexual harassment.

4.1.3 Behavioral Impact

The third impact of sexual abuse is a behavioral impact. The behavioral impact of the sexual abuse is that there is a sudden change on her behavior. She is not friendly anymore and turns to be more secretive. She becomes a silent girl and sometimes keeps her mouth shut when someone talks to her. She often speaks in mind than speaking to people. This can be seen from the quotation below.

Mr. Neck: "We meet again."Me: ...

Would he listen to "I need to go home change," or "Did you see what that bozo did?" Not a chance. I keep my mouth shut. Mr. Neck: "Where do you think you're going?"Me: ...It is easier not to say anything. Shut your trap, button your lip, can it. All that crap you hear on TV about communication and expressing feelings is a lie. Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say (Anderson, 1999: 9).

The above quotation describes that Melinda has a sudden change on her behavior, that is, she becomes more secretive than before. This means that she is only quiet or silent when someone is talking to her.

Melinda is not as communicative as before. She does not want to speak to many people anymore. She only wants to speak to Heather, but she becomes disappointed later because she does not want to speak to her. Melinda remains silent. She just keeps her mouth shut and silent when someone is talking to her, especially when Ms. Connors asks her to meet her.

5. Conclusion

After the analysis of the Impact of sexual abuse in Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*, the researchers then come to some conclusions. In the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, the main character Melinda Sordino is the victim of sexual abuse done by her senior at a summer party. Consuming alcoholic drink can make someone, especially a girl, not realize that something can possibly happen to her. Melinda Sordino is sexually abused even raped because she is drunk after consuming alcoholic drink in the summer party. In the party, she has done the wrong thing by drinking beer in order to fit in with others. Unfortunately, she cannot resist when Andy Evans rapes her that night. The sexual abuse which has happened to Melinda gives various impacts to herself. The impacts of sexual abuse experienced by Melinda are physical, psychological, and behavioral impacts.

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