

LAYERS AND IMPACTS OF CHILD ABUSE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE *AFTERLIVES*Muhammad Anwar¹, Khalil Muhammad², Waqar Ahmad³, Kamran Zaib⁴

Original Article

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Abstract

This article discusses various layers of child abuse and its consequent impacts on personality in forms of physical imparities, emotional injuries and psychological collapse. It employes qualitative method for exploring the existing knowledge on the subject as secondary data and text of the Afterlives as primary data to encompass the topic within the framework of ecological system theory through David Greenham's (2019) close reading technique from a holistic point of view. The study finds out that poverty, hunger, illness. war, abuse history. chores and cultural norms of child labor are reasons of physical, emotional and psychological abuse which impact an individual in the aforesaid ways.

Keywords: Impact, Child Abuse, Cultural Norms, Psychological Collapse

1. Introduction

The *Afterlives* explores the issue, along with many others, of child abuse. The major characters Khalifa, Ilyas, Hamza, and Afiya suffer from child abuse in the novel, *Afterlives*. Khalifa suffers various problems when he is a child; Ilyas is abused for ten years after he was kidnapped by African mercenaries. Hamza, a young boy is maltreated and abused by the German army officers and soldiers. Afiya, who is an orphan, is adopted by her uncle and aunt; they hurt and dehumanize her. Gurnah (2020) gives a number of key factors such as war, illness, poverty, culture and family that lead to the physical, psychological and emotional abuse of children, and its consequent psychological and educational effects on them as seen on Afiya, Hamza and Ilyas who feel emotionally distressed, unworthy and alone.

Gurnah (2020) writes that Afiya was expected to rise at the same time as her aunt did. She would shake her awake and give her a sharp slap on her bottom with emotionally hurting remarks, "Wake-up mischief" (p. 26)! He also notes that she was physically abused and beaten "for different reasons by her (Afiya's) brother and many other". Most of them "landed on her back and shoulder and cry out, and in the end she stumbled and fell, as she did so, she put out her left hand to protect her face, and stick landed on it with crushing force (Gurnah, 2020, p.41). Writing about how she was physically tortured by her uncle Makame, Gurnah describes that she "felt dizzy" when Makame slapped her on the back of her head she staggered (Gurnah, 2020, p.29). The story of abuse continues when the officer "briskly scratched Humza's upper arm with the needle" and he

punished him for every error with “violence or hard labor according to its severity” (Gurnah 2020, p. 49).

2. Research Questions

1. How different layers of child abuse and its impacts does Abdur Razak Gurnah explore in his work the *Afterlives*?

3. Literary Review

CAPTA Reauthorization Act (2010) reads that child abuse is an act on part of parents or caretakers which causes death, serious physical or emotional harm, molestation or exploitation. WHO Constitution on Child Abuse Prevention (1999) reads that child abuse or maltreatment covers all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or latent harm to the child's health, survival, growth or self-worth in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Similarly, Public Law (93-247) adds that physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, neglect treatment, or maltreatment of a child below the age of eighteen by a person who is accountable for a child's welfare under situations which indicate that a child's health and welfare is harmed or threatened thereby falls in child abuse. Bense, Rheinberger and Radbill (1997) state that maltreatment of children has, physically, emotionally, sexually and by forced child labor, revealed itself. In light of the above discussion, abuse happens when someone hurts or causes emotional or psychological stress to someone else.

Child abuse has various layers in the forms of emotional, psychological and physical abuse. These forms manifest themselves when a child feels unwanted or like a bad person so much that the child's normal development, learning, or behavior suffers (emotional abuse); when a victim is controlled, terrorized and denigrated (psychological abuse) or when a person is hurt or injured (physical abuse).

When a child under the age of eighteen is maltreated, either physically, socially, emotionally or psychologically, it impacts a child's mind and health. Nu Cepal and UNICEF say child abuse violates the most basic rights of children and adolescents. Martinez (2016) says that child maltreatment is abuse and neglect of children under the age of eighteen resulting in harm to the child's health, development, dignity, and survival in a related context involving responsibility truth, and power.

Daigle and Muftic (2016) claim that abuse can be learned. Wisdom (1989) suggests that there is a higher likelihood of abuse by parents if the parents themselves were abused as children. According to, Garbarino and Sherman (1980), it is socially, economically, and psychologically high-risk families where the majority of child maltreatment is found. There is a dynamic relationship between parents, children, and their immediate environment. Paxon and Waldfogel (2002) find that the socioeconomic status of families does affect the level of child maltreatment children with working mothers and absent fathers are more likely to be subject to neglect and abuse. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argue that child abuse occurs when parents who lack self-control do not socialize their children, hence producing children with low self-control. It is concluded that parents who are under considerable stress, or have personality problems are at increased risk for abusing their children. Gil (1971) says that lower-income families also tend to have more children and under the age of eighteen increase the risk of child physical abuse and neglect perpetration.

Kemoli & Mavindu (2014) express that child abuse takes place in forms of physical, sexual, emotional harm or easy dismissal of a child for his needs. It leaves catastrophic psychological harm and long-lasting physical, mental and emotional scars, which go with life-long effects on children with their inability to build healthy relationships. Iwaniec (2006) says that children, young people or adults who suffered from abuse in the past always refer to the emotional hurt and psychological pain before mentioning physical pain almost without exception. Victims of abuse will talk about fear, anxiety, loneliness, emotional lack of support and being ignored. Kinston and Bentovim (1980) note the abusing families practice to silence the victim by a process of blame and disqualification.

4. Research Methodology and Framework

The current study employs qualitative method It narrates and analyzes the visual data. It employs the technique of close reading of David Greenham (2019) to the text of the *Afterlives* for exploring different layers of child abuse within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1997) ecological system theory.

Bronfenbrenner (1997) says that child abuse happens for many things like the child's surroundings, cultural values, family, and laws. His ecological system theory is based on the idea that child development is a complex system of a relationship affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from the immediate setting of family and school to broad cultural values, laws, war, and economic status. He divides a person's environment into five different systems. Microsystem encompasses people and things that are in direct contact with a child such as parents, siblings, teachers, and school peers. Mesosystem encompasses interactions between a child and his environment such as parents and teachers, school peers and siblings. Exosystem includes interactions with neighborhood, parents, friends, and mass media which indirectly influence an individual. Macrosystem refers to influences of cultural values, customs, and laws on an individual. Chronosystem includes internal and external events. The internal events are psychological and biological changes such as puberty, cognitive and social transition, whereas external events include life-threatening illness, divorce, homelessness, the birth of a sibling, or a marriage.

5. Data Analysis

Gurnah (2020) has dealt with many issues in his work; child abuse is one of them. The *Afterlives* is abundant with instances of child abuse in its various manifestations. Mostly children in the *Afterlives* are physically and psychologically maltreated as they are involved in doing "chores for their uncles and aunts", and the ongoing war in Africa. Gurnah says that Khalifa "had lived away from his parents for most of his life, the years with the tutor, then with the banker, and then with the merchant" as his parents are poor and cannot fulfil his basic needs; he starts working at very early age (Gurnah, 2020, p 10).

Afiya, too. suffers abuse for illness and poverty. She is raised by her neighbors, her supposed uncles, after her parents pass away. They, being not her actual uncle and aunt, mistreat Afiya. Her uncle was a military man who had experienced abuse and was struggling to survive in poverty and stressful situations, which is why, to develop her writing skills, he slaps her "on her temple on her temple with her left hand, ... on the face and head with his right hand." she yells with terrors and does her best to escape and confine herself in a small room which he bolts. This sort of treatment badly impacts her mental state (Gurnah, 2020, P.41).

As the German Army arrives, villages are set on fire, fields are tramped and food stores are plundered. Hunger, illnesses, poverty, and stress prevail in Africa; children are fighting for their lives. Ilyas is a young boy whose parents have passed away, he is "only eleven", and his "ma and ba were very poor". Owing to poverty, he runs away from home and a German askeri kidnaps and mistreats him for agricultural labor (Gurnah, 2020, pp. 28-35). Hamza is abused for war and poverty. He is sold like a commodity for the debt which his father cannot pay. He flees from there and joins the war by becoming a member of the German military. He suffers from bodily and mental abuse as he completes the necessity of a soldier. The German officer maltreats Hamza for no apparent reason; he just looks into his eyes and makes him open his mouth and grips him by the wrist for a short while. He takes "a needle out of a metal tray, unstopped a small ampoule, and dipped the needle in the thick fluid he briskly scratched Hamza's upper arm with the needle and put it in another dish, which held a clear translucent liquid" (Gurnah, 2020, p. 45).

Dorota Iwaniec (1988) says that emotionally abused and neglected always refer to their emotional hurt and physiological pain before mentioning physical pain. They always talk about their fear, anxiety, loneliness, emotional abuse and being ignored.

The military treats people roughly because they themselves go through hard times. The ferocity with which the German troops treat and emotionally abuse Hamza is that they themselves have experienced abuse and maltreatment at the hands of others.

Afiya's aunt abuses her psychologically by telling horror and terrifying stories. She says to tells Afiya stories about a snake and tall man whose shadow flitted across the roofs of the house when the moon was full, and a disheveled old woman who roamed the road to the sea and sometimes took the form of a leopard who raided the village for a goat or a baby (Gurnah, 2020, P.25).

Physical abuse has both long-term and short-term physical effects. Afiya's hand is fractured as she is beaten by her uncle and the herbalist does all she can but her hand does not heal properly" (Gurnah, 2020, p.42). The officer physically abuses Hamza because he has been through similar circumstances. The brutality of German commander and how he mistreats Hamza is revealed in how "he stepped forward and with a wild swing slashed at Hamza, who turned sharply to avoid the blow. It caught him hip and ripped through flesh and bone. He struggled for breath having desperately but unable to take in air. He knew that the witness was not only rain that he was bleeding heavily". On Hamza the physical impact is evident. "He did not have any feeling in his right leg and could not move their arm. Sometimes it took an enormous effort even for him to open his eyes and was not able to move his hands and legs. One of his legs had a life-long impacts (Gurnah, 2020, pp.102-06).

An emotionally abused and neglected child feels alone and considers himself worthless. These impacts are seen in Khalifa's character as he came back to the town, he feels alone ... and worthless son" (Gurnah, 2020, p.10). Afiya feels alone and "sadder, small and as stronger in this world. She likes to go anywhere in case they come looking for her. She was afraid of everyone except for her brother's friend baba khalifa. She believes that if her baba had not come her uncle would have killed her sooner or later" (Gurnah, 2020, (pp. 27-42).

Afiya's mistrust of people, emotional and psychological problems have resulted from her severe abuse; Hamza is depressed and feels isolated and sorrowful "at the sight of heron standing motionless on the roof ridge. It made him feel so alone" (p 108)

Child abuse causes different physiological impacts. The impacts of abuse are witnessed in Afiya, Ilyas and Hamza. Afiya feels fear for the stories of "the snake and the tall man and the disheveled old woman all lived on the hill and came down from there to terrorize the world", even though Afiya is an adolescent now. Ilyas displays psychological effects as he says that "some of the time it was very frightened but it other times it forgets only self and just looks it was happening all around" Hamza exhibits the psychological effects of abuse in his experiences of fear; he is "confused and terrified and wondered if he might have preferred the carrier corps despite it is degraded status" (pp.25-48).

The impacts of abuse are seen in Afiya's and Hamza's difficulties in learning and economic performance. Afiya exhibits a poor learning capacity for having experienced physical emotional, and psychological abuse and maltreatment affects a child's capacity to study, as seen by the difficulties Afiya believes that "she would not be able to learn a book". Hamza is economically impacted; He is lacking self-esteem and "is looking for a work place (Gurnah, 2020, pp 33-57).

6. Conclusion and Findings

It is concluded that Gurnah (2020) has explored various layers of physical, emotional and psychological abuse and their impacts on the personality in the *Afterlives*. The abuses have resulted in Afiya's fear and cognitive inefficiency, Hamza's fear, low self-esteem and economic inactivity. Ilyas and Khalifa are emotionally, psychologically broken. Gurnah has also explored various reasons behind different layers of abuse; war, poverty hunger, illnesses and exposure of the abusers to abuses are some of them. The military abuses Hamza as the military officer himself was always shouted at; Afiya's uncle was also oppressed and stressed enough to abuse Afiya for developing her learning. She is abused as her supposed uncle and aunt were poverty-stricken. Hamza is sold for poverty. Khalifa "had lived away from his parents for most of his life, the years with the tutor, then with the banker, and then with the merchant" as his parents are poor and cannot fulfil his basic needs; he starts working at very early age (Gurnah, 2020, p 10).

It is found out that poverty, illness, hunger, exploitation, war and cultural norms, child labor and doing chore are some of the factors that lead to physical, emotional and psychological abuses which Gurnah (2020) encompasses in his work the *Afterlives* in the characters of Afiya, Hamza, Ilyas and Khalifa, the abused and the military officer, Afiya's uncle and aunt, the abusers.

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