

## POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER IN BARRY LEVINSON'S *THE SLEEPERS*

**Annisa Nur Fadilah Rozi**

English Literature, Faculty of Language and Art, Universitas Negeri Surabaya

annisa.18042@mhs.unesa.ac.id

### ABSTRACT

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is one form of reaction towards trauma or traumatic memories including childhood trauma. This article going to discuss Barry Levinson's *The Sleepers*, whom the main characters John Riley, Tommy Marcano, Shakes, and Michael Sullivan suffering several symptoms of PTSD caused by traumatic memories in their childhood. Childhood trauma approach and theory of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder are used in purpose to describe the cause of childhood trauma and the symptoms of PTSD that happens to the boys. Applying childhood trauma approach the main factors that cause PTSD are sexual abuse and power abuse happened in childhood. Common symptoms of PTSD are intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions which affect their adulthood.

**Keywords:** Post-traumatic stress disorder, childhood trauma, psychoanalysis

### ABSTRAK

Gangguan Stress Pasca Trauma merupakan salah satu bentuk reaksi terhadap trauma maupun kenangan yang traumatis termasuk trauma di masa kanak-kanak. Artikel ini akan mendiskusikan salah satu film Barry Levinson yang berjudul *The Sleepers* dimana pemeran utamanya adalah John Riley, Tommy Marcano, Shakes, and Michael Sullivan mengalami beberapa gejala Gangguan Stress Pasca Trauma yang disebabkan oleh kenangan traumatis yang terjadi ketika mereka masih kanak-kanak. Pendekatan terhadap trauma masa kanak-kanak dan teori mengenai Gangguan Stress Pasca Trauma digunakan dengan tujuan untuk menjelaskan penyebab trauma pada masa kanak-kanak dan gejala Gangguan Stress Pasca Trauma yang dialami oleh pemeran utama. Menggunakan pendekatan trauma masakanak-kanak dapat diketahui bahwa penyebab trauma yang berujung pada Gangguan Stress Pasca Trauma adalah kekerasan seksual dan penyalahgunaan kekuasaan. Gejala yang umumnya dialami oleh penderita Gangguan Stress Pasca Trauma adalah memori yang terganggu, menghindari, perubahan negative dalam cara berpikir dan suasana hati, dan perubahan dalam rekasi fisik maupun emosional yang mempengaruhi masa dewasa para pemeran utama.

**Kata Kunci:** Gangguan stress pasca trauma, trauma masa kanak-kanak, psikoanalisa

### INTRODUCTION

Humans keep growing throughout their lifetime passing several phases. The most crucial part of human development is childhood since childhood is the base of human life where life begins and humans become more aware or sensitive to their environment (Rodan, 2018). All the experiences that are experienced by the individual in their childhood will determine their personalities during adulthood, including experiences that caused traumatic memories. In modern psychoanalytic language, trauma is a life experience that is defined by its severity, the subject's inability to adapt effectively to it, and the upheaval and long-term ramifications that it causes in the psychical organization. (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). According to Balaev (2008), trauma assigns to an individual's instinctive

reaction to a traumatic experience that deconstructs one's concept of self and the boundaries by which one judges society. Another perspective about trauma uttered by Heidarizadeh (2015) is a traumatic event that consists of a single incident or experience; it involves the individual's feelings and mentality. Heidarizadeh also added that psychological trauma can engage long-term negative consequences, especially for children, and is usually called childhood trauma.

Definition of childhood trauma according to Bruce D. Perry in his book *Effects of Traumatic Events on Children an Introduction* provide childhood trauma a certain situation when a child had terrible events and affected their life as adults. Almost all researchers agree that the root of most long-term depression, anxiety, and psychological illness is childhood traumas (Dar et al, 2015), since traumatized individuals saw everything differently they have to convey the traumatic experience into

their perceptions of life's meaning, self-concept, and the world or called as psychodynamic perspective (Gerrity & Solomon, 1996). Based on an article written by Morin (2020), define childhood trauma as an issue accomplished by children that jeopardize them physically and mentally. Traumatic events experienced by a child could be identified into four maltreatment sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, and neglect (World Health Organization). Childhood trauma does not have to happen to the child directly; for example, witnessing a beloved person suffer or being tormented can be traumatic.

Traumatic events in childhood could lead to disorders in adulthood (Rutter, 1993; Lewis, 1997; Paris, 1998) since children are vulnerable to trauma and way harder to cope with the trauma. Children feel stigmatized, self-esteem decreases and the outcome is the worse, children may have anger and aggression issues, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and self-destructive behavior are all common. (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986). The failure to cope with childhood trauma does increase the risk of developing psychological symptoms in adulthood (Paris, 1998). Traumatic memories during childhood could lead to post-traumatic stress disorder. Based on an essay by Ehlers & Clark (2000), post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD is a normal response to traumatic incidents like violence, natural catastrophes, or serious accidents. Flashbacks, nightmares, and acute anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event, are all possible symptoms of PTSD. In general, the symptoms of PTSD are grouped into four types: intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reactions.

Intrusive memories include reenacting the traumatic event as if it were happening again, for example. such as nightmares and flashbacks. Avoidance in PTSD could be in form of avoiding thinking or talking about the traumatic events. Negative changes in thinking and mood might appear in various forms, but generally in form of emotional numbness and difficulty maintaining close relationships. Self-destructive behavior (drinking too much, doing drugs) and irritability (angry outbursts or aggressive behavior) are included in changes in physical and emotional reactions. Period and early childhood trauma have been indicated to be a factor in the development of PTSD (Dar, et. al., 2015)

The portrayal of childhood trauma leading to post-traumatic stress disorder can be seen in the popular British series, *The End Of The F\*\*\*ing World* directed by Kate Ogborn. In the series, there are two teenagers named James and Alyssa who suffer from their painful life and past. James experienced a hurtful past, he saw his mother

commit suicide in front of his eyes and it affects his psychology. James started to not feel things as his response to the trauma he lives with or can be defined if James has the symptoms of PTSD, negative changes in thinking and mood, so he experienced emotionally numb. On the other hand, Alyssa being left by her biological father when she was eight years old makes her longing so much for a father figure she also have abandonment issue since she lives with her mother and step-dad who seems to abandon her. Alyssa has difficulty maintaining good relationships with her friends and her parents. Both of them carry their wounds caused by the trauma they accomplished in childhood, even after years, and they are still haunted by the trauma they have. Past trauma and traumatic memories affect the mind of the characters (Heidarizadeh, 2015).

Barry Lee Levinson or best known as Barry Levinson was born on April 6, 1942, in Baltimore, Maryland, United States of America. American film director and screenwriter noted for his versatility in developing any theme of films and TV shows but mostly works on comedy-drama and drama films. He is descended from Russian-Jewish and grew up in Forest Park, Baltimore. After graduating from high school, Levinson continued his study at American University in Washington before he decided to go to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, Levinson worked for Oxford Company, studying acting, improvisation, and production. His career started when he was writing his first work for variety shows such as *The Marty Feldman Comedy Machine*, *The Lohman and Barkley Show*, *The Tim Conway Show*, and *The Carol Burnett Show*. After he received some success as a screenwriter, Levinson began his career as a director by directing the film *Diner* (1982) and the film was chosen for Best Original Screenplay in Oscar nomination.

Several films written and directed by Levinson such as *Unfaithfully Yours* (1984), *The Natural* (1984), *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985), *Tin Men* (1987), *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987), *Rain Man* (1988), *Avalon* (1990), *Bugsy* (1991), *Toys* (1992), *Sleepers* (1996), *Wag The Dog* (1997).

Childhood trauma in literary works become a recent trend which attracts authors for centuries (Lejkowski, 2012). Recent literary works have shown an acute sensitivity toward portraying childhood trauma and the impacts on the character's personality development and psychological symptoms caused by the trauma. According to Lejkowski (2012) authors are constrained to represent childhood trauma or past trauma because of the long-life impacts. Authors such as Margaret Atwood and Mark Twain adopt the issue of childhood trauma in their works by showing the

positive meaning of childhood trauma by depicting a transformational episode that begins with anguish, sorrow, and agony and ends with wisdom and insight. (Heidarizadeh, 2015).

A study by Richard Lejkowski with the title *Childhood Trauma And The Imagination In American Literature* (2012) provides the examination of childhood trauma and the impacts on the characters' psychology with the object of examination is American Literature. Lejkowski took some popular works to support his statement such as *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Light In August*, *Bluest Eyes*, and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* which every work narrate different cause of traumatic experiences that lead to childhood trauma. *Huck Finn* experienced physical abuse from his abusive father and it has an effect on his self-image and renders him vulnerable to dominant-submissive behavioral patterns, while the *Light In August* narrates the life of Joe Christmas who suffered psychological trauma caused by sexual confusion and verbal abuse as the results Joe isolate himself from society and he has acute spiritual distress. *The Bluest Eyes* tells a story about Pecola who experienced sexual abuse that caused her feeling of inferiority and self-disgust. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* story about Oscar who lost his parents in the 9/11 incident that cause him to suffer from traumatic parental loss and diagnose with depression.

Another study that adopts the theme of childhood trauma to post-traumatic stress disorder was written by Sandy Rodan entitled *The Impacts Of Psychological Childhood Trauma Into The Main Character, Libby Day, In Gillian Flynn's Dark Places* (2018), which explores the connection between past childhood trauma and its impacts toward Libby Day's life and personality. Narrate about how Libby Day suffering from the past childhood trauma she has caused by her brother who she thinks is the perpetrator of her family massacre, since then Libby Day lose her normal life and lives haunted by her traumatic memory. In the purpose to examine the impacts of childhood trauma on Libby Day's character, Rodan applies characterization theory by Abrams and Wellek's theory on Literature and Psychology to approach the object.

Two previous studies above provide an examination of the cause of childhood trauma in literary works. The study by Richard Lejkowski in his work entitled *Childhood Trauma And The Imagination In American Literature* (2012) delivers the essence of childhood trauma and its impacts on the characters' psychology. Lejkowski granted complete analysis of traumatic events that can trigger the personality diminishes. Lejkowski also added the influence of childhood trauma in modern literature. Meanwhile, the study of *The Impacts Of*

*Psychological Childhood Trauma Into The Main Character, Libby Day, In Gillian Flynn's Dark Places* (2018) by Sandy Rodan provides significant and detailed analysis of the main character, Libby Day, focuses on the impacts of childhood trauma in Libby Day's character by applying psychological approach and characterization theory. The findings of the study are Libby Day become a different person after experiencing trauma when she was a child. Both the study apply psychological approach to accomplish the cause of childhood trauma in different objects and its impacts on psychology.

This study will be using Barry Levinson's *The Sleepers* film as the object to analyze the factors that cause trauma in *The Sleepers* and the symptoms of PTSD in *The Sleepers* by applying psychological approach to childhood trauma. This study aims to understand the long-life impacts caused by childhood trauma on characters' personality development. *Sleepers* is a film about four boys who live in an environment full of violence and normalize domestic violence. The four boys were named Tomy Marcano, John Riley, Shakes, and Michael Sullivan. They live just like other cheerful boys who love to be involved in trouble but one day they are planning a prank that goes wrong which requires them prisoned for eighteen months in a children's prison, while prisoned they experienced something that makes them become traumatized children. Father Bobby Carillo is a pastor in a glorious church in Hell's Kitchen, the character of Father Bobby here narrates as a respectable person who is always being friend with the four boys. Father Bobby plays important role in their life, their past, their trauma, and their justice.

In the process of representing long-life impacts of childhood trauma in personality development related to the general and common effects of childhood trauma. There are six common effects of childhood trauma according to the Complex Childhood Trauma theory by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Those effects are attachment and relationship, emotional response, dissociation, behavior, cognition, and self-concept and future orientation. The theory will be a bridge to the factors that cause trauma in *The Sleepers* and the symptoms of PTSD in *The Sleepers*.

This study concerns the factors that cause trauma in *The Sleepers* and the symptoms of PTSD in *The Sleepers*. This legal crime drama written and directed by Barry Levinson depicted that childhood trauma could bring abounding pain to the victims. This study will apply the topic of childhood trauma leading to post-traumatic stress disorder and implement psychoanalysis approach. This research aims to examine the cause of childhood trauma and the symptoms of PTSD that are being experienced

by the four boys' from *The Sleepers*. This study is also expected to increase awareness about childhood trauma and its impacts on adulthood.

This study focuses to answers the question about the factors that cause childhood trauma in *The Sleepers* and the symptoms of PTSD they experienced after the trauma. In this case, childhood trauma happened to Tomy Marcano, John Riley, Shakes, and Michael Sullivan when they were a child. They are sexually abused by a prison warden in children's prison, Sean Nokes. Tomy Marcano, John Riley, Shakes, and Michael Sullivan are best friends, they live in the same neighborhood. They live in an environment where domestic violence is normal. One day, one incident changes their lives. They were sentenced to eighteen months in children's prison where they meet Sean Nokes. Sean Nokes sexually abused them and treated them unfairly. The memories of abuse they experienced stay in their mind and become traumatic memories. According to Heidarizadeh (2015), a traumatic event consists of a single incident or experience; it involves the individual's feelings and mentality. Traumatic memories experienced by the four boys leave wounds in their hearts and cause them to have low self-esteem.

Forward the discussion on the impacts of childhood trauma on personality development will be directly conveyed through the four boys characters who experienced traumatic events in their childhood. This study will analyze how childhood trauma could affect the four boys' personality development. Since the portrayals of childhood trauma and the impacts delivered by characters in this film this study will analyze the characters through the dialogues and quotations from the film.

## METHOD

This is a literary study that used qualitative term methodology by describing the conflict happening between main characters. Qualitative research is associated with a range of different methods, perspectives, and approaches (Allison & Susan, 2005), applies psychological approach to literature. In circumstance, this study intends to reveal the factors that cause childhood trauma and the impacts in psychological, especially in PTSD development. Childhood trauma is known as the main cause of long-life psychological effects in adulthood and many authors bring up the issues with the purpose to spread awareness about the impact of childhood trauma in adulthood.

The object of analysis is a literary work in the form of a film. The information for this study comes from Barry Levinson's *The Sleepers*. The

characters' ideas, feelings, and actions are described in the shape of narrations, storylines, quotations, conversations, and monologues emanated by the characters. It can be defined as textual analysis. *The Sleepers*, a 1996 American legal crime drama film directed and written by Barry Levinson, is the used object in this study. Tommy Marcano is played by Billy Crudup, John Riley is played by Ron Eldard, Shakes is played by Jason Patric, and Michael Sullivan is played by Brad Pitt.

Monologues and dialogues between characters are used in the study, as well as words that reflect the storyline and characterization. Furthermore, this research includes a textual analysis as well as the utilization of images from the film. The data are taken from the movie through several steps. First, watching the movie several times to understand the movie and also to find detailed issues to be analyzed. Second, collecting relevant references to the issues and the movie that is being analyzed. The final step is to analyze the factors that cause childhood trauma and its impacts on psychology, especially PTSD in *The Sleepers* movie.

## DISCUSSION

### Childhood Trauma

The discussion will lead straight forward to figuring out the factors that cause childhood trauma and the impacts of it on the personality development of the main characters in *The Sleepers* movie. The main characters in *The Sleepers* are Tommy Marcano played by Billy Crudup, John Riley played by Ron Eldard, Shakes played by Jason Patric, and Michael Sullivan played by Brad Pitt. They are best friends and live in the same neighborhood called Hell's Kitchen. Hell's Kitchen is known as a place with high rate of criminality, including domestic violence, murder, and gangsters. The four boys are known as best friends, their friendship runs deeper than blood. The four boys spent lots of time inside a church named Holy Angels as altar boys, they went well with the priest known as Father Robert Carrillo. Father Robert Carrillo was a longshoreman's son and he had a long list of petty crimes before he found his calling to be a priest.

The boys always have an active competition between the four of them, competition about who to come up with the best and boldest prank. But one day in the summer of 1967, the day their lives were forever altered. They planned a prank on a hotdog vendor, the plan is Shakes will walk over to the hotdog vendor and order everything he wants. After he puts his order, the

vendor then hands him his order and he will run off without paying. The vendor will chase after him to pay for the hotdog, while the vendor chases him, his friends could feast in his absence. The plan was perfect but sadly gone wrong. While Shakes trying to escape from the vendor, the rest of the boys have an idea to move the hotdog cart to another block but they cannot wait for Shake any longer so they take the cart to the subway. They leaning the cart on the top edge of the stairwell, purpose to when the vendor comes and grab the cart, three of them will let the cart go so the vendor will be struggling to ease the cart back onto the sidewalk. But sadly, the cart was too heavy for them to hold so the cart go downstairs and injured a man.

As the result of the prank goes wrong, the boys went to court and were sentenced to a different period remanded in custody, Thomas, John, and Michael were sentenced to 18 months, meanwhile, Shakes was sentenced to 12 months, and all of them will be jailed in Wilkinson Home for Boys. The place that should be their place to reflect on all of their faults becomes real hell for them to live. Nokes, one of the guards in the building leads the other three guards to sexually abuse the boys every day. They cannot speak to anyone about the abuse they experiencing because it will hurt their families and their dignity, besides that, Nokes also threatens the boys that if they are trying to speak they will experience something way more worst than what they are undergoing now. For that reason, they remains silence until their time is remanded in custody end. They save all the memories by themselves and slowly become nightmare that turns out into trauma. They live with the pain and its horror that they were too afraid to let it go.

Childhood trauma is an occasion in an individual's life that is characterized by its power and happened in the childhood phase, by the subject's inadequacy to react enough to it, and by the commotion and dependable impacts that it brings about in the psychical association (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Childhood trauma could be caused by childhood abuse, according to American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) 1995 defines childhood abuse as a repeated pattern of damaging interactions between parents or other significant adults and a child that becomes typical of the relationship. Several forms of childhood abuse such as physical, sexual, and verbal abuse or any form of action that causes the child to feel worthless, unlovable, insecure, and endangered (Dar et. al, 2015). In this case, childhood abuse was caused by power abuse and sexual abuse that happened repeatedly to the boys in Wilkinson Home for Boys by Nokes and his friends.

### 1. Power Abuse

Power abuse is also a factor that causes childhood trauma. The boys lived in Wilkinson Home for Boys for a year and they have to live with the guard who hates them without any exact reason. Nokes and his friends always treat the boys dirty, he once asks them to eat their lunch on the ground just like a dog to show them if the absolute power is in his hand. Nokes also shows his power in front of the boys by saying:

*“Well, I don’t give a fuck if you’re hungry or not. You eat.. because I’m telling you to eat.”* (Lavinson, 1996).

He wants the boys to follow everything he said to show that he got the absolute right to do everything he wants because he has power at the Wilkinson as a guard. If the boys didn't do what he wants, he will use the word "rules" and "discipline" to make the boys obey him.

*“Show the boys how you follow my rules. Rules! You understand? Hey look, boys, see how he follows my rules?”* (Lavinson, 1996).

Nokes hates the boys from the start and treats them badly on their first day. Nokes shows his power by dictating the boys with violence just to make sure the boys understand the hierarchy prevails there.

The boys once try to fight Nokes back but they failed and they receive hell in the return. The boys try to show their power through a football game, and they won easily but then Nokes and his friend feel their pride hurt by the boys, and they gave the boys punishment. Nokes and friends, beat the boys until they wish they were dead. The feeling of helplessness makes the boys obey Nokes because have no choice. Nokes shows if he is the one who has the absolute power at Wilkinson as a guard and the boys are only custody without power.

The way Nokes treated them become traumatic memory that hurt them so much and stay in their mind for a lifetime. According to Dar et.al (2015), even after adjusting for physical assault victimization, the impacts of power abuse could be wide-ranging, including stress, depression, confused feelings, and lack of self-esteem, which could lead to a prediction of illegal substance use, unfavorable health beliefs, and cognitive impairment.

### 2. Sexual Abuse

Besides power abuse, Nokes and his friends also abused the boys sexually. On the first day at Wilkinson Home for Boys, Nokes visit Shakes in his cell and asks him to take his clothes off.

*"Toss your clothes on the floor."*  
(Lavinson, 1996)

At that moment Shakes didn't understand and didn't aware if what Nokes did was included as sexual abuse, so he just did what Nokes says. Nokes targeted the boys as a sexual object for him and his friends by taking advantage of his position in Wilkinson Home for Boys. Removal of a child's clothing, sexual touching, or sexual encounters between persons of different ages and wealth are all examples of sexual abuse of a child (Valente, 2005; Finkelhor, 1990).

After that day Nokes started to abuse the boys even more. Nokes brings the boys to the basement to abuse them sexually.

*"What do you want?"*  
*"A blow job. Down on your knees. Face the wall."* (Lavinson, 1996).

Nokes and his friends started to ask the boys to do oral copulation and sodomy. Unfortunately, Nokes and his friends abuse the boys frequently. They can be randomly awakened by Nokes or his friends and ask them to do sexual activities. The boys can't sleep peacefully ever since. They also experience sustainable nightmares. The boys can't fight Nokes because they have different power, physically and psychologically. After that incident, the boys become moody and started insolated themselves from their family. The incidents stuck in their mind like a never-ending nightmare, playing over and over in their mind. They feel helpless, isolated, alienated, guilty, blamed themselves, and felt humiliated.

### **The Symptoms of PTSD as The Impacts of Childhood Trauma**

Childhood trauma happened to Tommy Marcano, John Riley, Shakes, and Michael Sullivan followed by several symptoms, the vast majority of them to a normal state of functioning in a relatively short time. Continuous abuse that happened to the boys slowly but surely bury their happiness, hope, and their precious childhood. Tommy Marcano, John Riley, Shakes, and Michael Sullivan cannot tell anyone about every bad thing that happens in Wilkinson Home for Boys, since Nokes and his friends threatened to torment them even more. The boys don't dare to tell their families about what happened to them inside the prison, since they are in prison, they have limited time to communicate with their families outside the prison also they cannot freely communicate with them because they are under the supervision of Nokes. Barring that, they want to hide everything from their families

because of several factors, such as shame, guilt, and feelings of inferiority. The victims of abuse mostly remain silent to protect themselves from stigma and to avoid rejection from those who learned about their stories (Holmes & Slap, 1998; Valente, 2005).

The traumatic events that happened to them in their childhood become the main factors or pre-existing symptoms of mental health problems. Serious negative psychological and physical effects as the effect of traumatic events, including reduced self-esteem, depression, loneliness, anxiety, and destructive behavior. In *The Sleepers*, Tommy Marcano, John Riley, Shakes, and Michael Sullivan undergo several PTSD symptoms as the impact of their unhealed childhood trauma. In general, there are four types of PTSD symptoms, intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in physical and emotional reaction. The most conspicuous symptoms experienced by the boys are intrusive memories and changes in physical and emotional reactions. The boys never live their lives as they used to after all the traumatic memories that happened to them. Under the pressure of Nokes and friends, they keep everything inside their heads as dirtiest secrets. All the traumatic memories in their heads cause several impacts on their psychology, unconsciously they sustain several symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD.

#### **1. Intrusive Memories**

The first symptom of PTSD that emerges is having the same nightmare every night. The boys cannot go to sleep peacefully after they have been sexually abused by Nokes and friends. They replay all the traumatic memories in their head while they are asleep and often wake up from their sleep with anxious and scared feelings. Upsetting dreams or nightmares about traumatic events are one of PTSD symptoms that happens to the boys as a sign of PTSD. They experienced nightmares about traumatic events even after they grow up and leave Wilkinson Home For Boys, they cannot sleep with the light off because it scared them and remain them about the traumatic events. It shows when Michael has a conversation with Shakes, Michael has plans to wage an act of revenge towards Nokes and friends. Sadly, Shakes hesitate about the plan because he feels it will make him remember the traumatic events again but Michael said:

*"Do you still sleep with the light on?"*  
(Lavinson, 1996).

Shakes said nothing because he knows if Michael, John, and Tommy are still haunted by the traumatic

memories and sleeping with the light off could be pretty hideous for them, including for Shakes.

Besides upsetting nightmares, the boys also experience recurrent unwanted distressing memories of the traumatic memories. In one scene, Shakes praying inside the church and when he starts praying he remembers all the traumatic events that happened in Wilkinson Home for Boys when Nokes and his friends forced him to do sodomy while he was praying.

*"Put your hands on the table and lay them flat. Spread your legs. Now start thinking up some prayers."* (Levinson, 1996).

After that day it is hard for Shakes to not recall the memories when he is praying to his God. The other boys, Tommy, John, and Michael also experience the same thing as Shakes.

## 2. Avoidance

The symptoms of avoidance in *The Sleepers* can be seen in the form of avoiding talking or thinking about traumatic events. The boys never tell anyone about everything that happened to them in the Wilkinson Home for Boys. They have many reasons why they avoid telling anyone about it. Trauma, shame, and self-blaming are some of them. Sexual abuse and power abuse hurt them mentally. Thinking and talking about the traumatic events can be more hurtful for them, hurt their feeling, their pride, and hurt their families. When they are sexually abused by Nokes and friends, they try to hide it from everyone because they feel ashamed. Ashamed because they have no power to fight back, ashamed for letting it happen to them.

*"There are no clear pictures of the sexual abuse we endured. I buried it as deep as it could go."* (Levinson, 1996)

They try their best to keep it so everyone will never know about it. It is hard for them to live that way, they cannot sleep peacefully. When someone brings up the issue about it, they try to avoid the conversation because it hurts for them to remember how desperate and powerless they have been at that moment.

*"We got no choice but to live with it. And talking makes living it harder. So, we might as well not even talk about it."* (Levinson, 1996).

For them living with the memories is already hurtful and talking about it makes it more painful so it is better to not think and talk about everything that happened in Wilkinson Home for

Boys. They needed help but they were too afraid for asking because they were scared that people know about the truth, the truth they have perfectly hidden from everyone. Tommy, John, Michael, and Shakes coincide with never talking about their past in front of each other, they choose to suffer everything by themselves. It is easier for them because they don't have to talk to everyone about what happened to them inside Wilkinson Home For Boys, for them talking and thinking about it is just like pouring salt into fresh wounds.

## 3. Negative Changes in Thinking and Mood

Negative changes in thinking and mood have several forms, but the most striking forms in *The Sleepers* movie are feeling detached from family and friends and feeling emotionally numb. Even in *The Sleepers* movie, the forms of a symptom are not shown explicitly but the symptoms can be easily seen through the dialogue between Tommy, John, Shakes, and Michael and their behaviors.

Tommy, John, Shakes, and Michael are best friends, they know each other for life and spend all their time together in Hell's Kitchen. They also have each other backs when they are sentenced to a year in prison. They support each other, they live for each other. After the abuse happens to them, the frequency of communication between them decreases intensively. They choose to stay in their cells alone, thinking about what happened to them. Sadly after they leave Wilkinson, they remain friends but never talk to each other for years.

*"In all years since Wilkinson's, we had never once spoken to each other about what happened there. We remained caring friends but the relationship had been altered."* (Levinson, 1996).

What happened at Wilkinson changes their friendship. Hard for them to meet each other and remember all the traumatic memories that happened to them and unconsciously make some space in their friendship. Not only was their friendship impacted by the traumatic memories but also their feelings. Shakes and Michael didn't show serious symptoms of feeling emotionally numb but were different from their friends, Tommy and John. Tommy and John turn out differently after the traumatic events happened. They become heartless and cold as stone.

*"They are not good boys anymore. They're killers now. Cold as stone."* (Levinson, 1996)

Tommy and John are the ones who impacted the most. They can't control their emotions and feelings and become heartless and

cold. They lose themselves when trying to fight back all the bad memories from the past that haunted them every time and everywhere. They can't escape from it and the only way is to release all their emotions to themselves.

#### **4. Changes in Physical and Emotional Reactions**

*"He was an alcoholic and a cocaine abuser with fast temper and a faster trigger."* (Levinson, 1996)

The narration above describes John who becomes an alcoholic and cocaine abuser at a very young age. He consumes all of that for the purpose to escape from his trauma in the past when he was in Wilkinson. The narration explicitly explains about one of PTSD symptoms, destructive behavior. Destructive behaviors in this case mostly are consuming alcohol frequently in the long term, drugs, and smoking. John and Tommy are alcohol and drugs abuser. Shakes rarely consumed alcohol but he was an alcoholic. Michael is an alcoholic and smoker. The boys have different destructive behaviors but among them, John and Tommy are the extreme ones.

*"John Riley's bloated body was found face up in tenement building right next to the bottle gin that killed him."* (Levinson, 1996)

John Riley was found dead because of alcohol. He consumes a huge amount of alcohol until he is overdose. The narration above shows that the destructive behavior in John is quite extreme because he can't control himself to stop consuming the gin. John Riley in his teenage age wants to be a priest just like father Bobby, he likes going to church, following several preachings, and always helping father Bobby with church things. He was a good boy but after the traumatic events at Wilkinson happened to him, he changes. He becomes one of the founding members of West Side Boys. He starts to live on the streets, drunks, drugs, and suspects in several unsolved homicides. He completely forgot about his dream to be a priest, all he knows is how to cope with the pain and anger caused by Nokes and friends when he was in Wilkinson. Tommy Marcano also ends up the same as John. He is also an alcoholic and drug abuser. Just like John, Tommy is also a founder member of West Side Boys. He was found dead because of five close-range shots to his head and body.

*"He once shot a mechanic dead for moving ahead of him in a movie line."* (Levinson, 1996)

Besides destructive behavior, another form of change in physical and emotional reactions is irritability or aggressive behavior or angry outbursts. In *The Sleepers*, John narrates as a good boy when he was a teenager but after he lives for a while at Wilkinson, he changes into someone different. He has fast temper and tends to do reckless actions. The narration above describes if John doesn't hesitate to kill someone because of small little things. He was also involved in five unsolved homicides. John becomes an angry avenger who believes that someone has to pay for his misery. He has the desire to abuse others as a form of revenge.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The boys undergo several symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder caused by childhood trauma but they didn't notice it. Intrusive memories are the beginning of PTSD, a significant form of intrusive memories is repeated memories about the abuse in form of a nightmare. Every night the boys deal with the nightmare and they can't even sleep with the light off. The boys also avoid talking about their trauma since it will be caused them open hurtful memories, avoidance is one of the PTSD symptoms. The boys knew each other forever but after the abuse happened they never talk to each other because they have fear if they meet and talk to each other they will remember the traumatic events, Tommy and John also change into someone who are cold as stone. The negative changes in mood and the way of thinking are also symptoms of PTSD. The boys are likely to consume alcohol in huge amounts, besides alcohol, they are also drug users and smokers. Changes in physical and emotional reactions are the last symptoms of PTSD that happened to the boys, they try to not sober just to forget all the bitter memories they have to face.

This study has discussed childhood trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in *The Sleepers* based on the boys' point of view. This study is still far from the word perfect since the limitation of research scope and limited time of research there are some points that have been left out of the discussion. This research didn't cover how childhood trauma could lead to Post Traumatic Disorder and the impacts of PTSD on the sufferer's lives. Hoping in future research, other researchers could bring up the issues to spread awareness about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in society.



**REFERENCES**

- Balaev, M. (2008). Trends in Literary Trauma Theory. *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 41(2), 149–166.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44029500>
- Browne, A., & Finkelhor, D. (1986). Impact of child sexual abuse: a review of the research. *Psychological bulletin*, 99(1), 66.
- Cherry, K. (2020). *The Psychology of Personality Formation*. Verywellmind.Com.  
<https://www.verywellmind.com/personality-development-2795425>
- Dar, M. A. (2015). Role of Early Childhood Traumatic Stress in the Development of PTSD in Adulthood: A Review. *Journal of Psychiatry*, 18(3) 1-4.
- Gerrity, E.T., & Solomon, S.D. (1996). The treatment of PTSD and related stress disorders: Current research and clinical knowledge. In A.J. Marsella, M.J. Friedman, E.T. Gerrity, & R.M. Scurfield (Eds.). *Ethnocultural aspects of posttraumatic stress disorder: Issues, research and clinical applications*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Heidarizadeh, N. (2015). The Significant Role of Trauma in Literature and Psychoanalysis. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192 . doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.093  
<https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/child-abuse-and-neglect/>  
<https://www.who.int/news-room/factsheets/detail/child-maltreatment>
- Laplanche, J., & Pontalis, B. (1973). *The Language of Psycho-analysis*.
- Lejkowski, R. (2012). *CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND THE IMAGINATION IN AMERICAN LITERATURE*. State University of New Jersey.
- Lewis, M. (1997). *Altering fate: Why the past does not predict the future*. Guilford Press.
- Morin, A. (2021). *Treating the Effects of Childhood Trauma*. 1–7.
- Paris, J. (1998). *Does Childhood Trauma Cause Personality Disorders in Adults ?* 43(March), 148–153.
- Paris, J. (1999). Nature and Nurture in Psychiatry: A Predisposition-stress Model of Mental Disorders. In *American Psychiatric Press*.
- Perry, B. D. (1994). *Neurobiological sequelae of childhood trauma: Post-traumatic stress disorders in children*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.
- Perry, B. D. (2003). *EFFECTS OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS ON CHILDREN AN INTRODUCTION*.
- Rodan, S. (2018). *THE IMPACTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CHILDHOOD TRAUMA INTO THE MAIN CHARACTER, LIBBY DAY, IN GILLIAN FLYNN'S DARK PLACES*. Universitas Sanata Dharma.
- Rutter, M., & Rutter, M. (1993). *Developing minds: Challenge and continuity across the life span*. Basic Books.
- Valente, S. M. (2005). Sexual abuse of boys. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 18(1), 10–16.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2005.00005.x>