

## **Sexual Abuse and Traumatic Memory in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* Movie (2012)**

**Nabila Pipilika**

English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya  
e-mail: [nabila.19047@mhs.unesa.ac.id](mailto:nabila.19047@mhs.unesa.ac.id)

### **Abstrak**

Pelecehan seksual secara luas didefinisikan sebagai setiap tindakan atau perilaku seksual yang terjadi tanpa izin dari korban. Hal ini mencakup penggunaan kekerasan, persuasi, atau tekanan untuk memaksa seseorang melakukan tindakan seksual yang bertentangan dengan keinginannya. Pelecehan seksual dapat berdampak pada trauma jangka pendek maupun jangka panjang bagi korbannya, baik anak-anak maupun orang dewasa. Penelitian ini menggunakan data dari film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* karya Stephen Chbosky. Film ini menceritakan tentang trauma masa kecil, persahabatan, dan kehidupan cinta remaja yang dialami oleh masing-masing karakternya. Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti akan membandingkan bagaimana trauma akibat pelecehan seksual pada Karakter Charlie dan Sam serta membandingkan bagaimana dampak trauma tersebut terhadap kehidupan mereka. Peneliti akan melakukan pendekatan penelitian ini dengan menggunakan buku Levine "Trauma and Memory". Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Data penelitian ini berasal dari observasi film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012) dan dari aspek sinematografi. Sumber lain termasuk buku Levine, situs web, jurnal, review jurnal, dan informasi online terkait lainnya.

**Kata Kunci:** *Pelecehan Seksual; trauma; Penyimpanan; Memori Traumatis*

### **Abstract**

Sexual abuse is broadly defined as any sexual action or behavior that occurs without the permission of the victim. It entails employing force, persuasion, or pressure to force someone to do sexual actions against their will. Sexual abuse can impact a short-term or long-term trauma for the victim, either child or adult. This study uses data from the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky. This film tells about childhood traumas, friendships, and the teenage love life that experienced by each of the characters. In this research, researcher will compare how trauma caused by sexual abuse on Charlie and Sam's Characters and compare how the trauma impact their life. The researcher will approach this study using Levine's book "Trauma and Memory". This study used a descriptive qualitative approach. The data for this study came from observations of the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012) and from the aspects of cinematography. Other sources included Levine's books, websites, journals, journal reviews, and other pertinent online information.

**Keywords:** *Sexual Abuse; Trauma; Memory; Traumatic Memory*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sexual abuse is broadly defined as any sexual action or behavior that occurs without the permission of the victim. It entails employing force, persuasion, or pressure to force someone to do sexual actions against their will. Rape, sexual assault, victimization, harassment, and exploitation are all examples of sexual harassment. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2002) describes sexual abuse as "any sexual act, attempt to solicit sexual advances, unsolicited sexual comments or proposals, or use of coercion to traffic or direct related persons, anywhere, including but not limited to the home and the workplace". Victims of sexual

harassment can occur in all walks of life and regardless of gender, age, or ethnicity. In a study on the prevalence of sexual abuse in children in an adult sample, it was revealed that 15% of women and 5% of men had experienced sexual abuse during childhood (Pereda et al., 2009). It is even worse that there are more cases of sexual abuse in children than cases of sexual abuse in adults. According to Stoltenborgh's research shows that cases of sexual abuse globally in girls are 25% and boys 15% (Stoltenborgh et al., 2012). Meanwhile, cases of sexual abuse in adults were 18.3% for women and 1.4% for men (Black et al., 2011).

Sexual abuse can impact a short-term or long-term trauma for the victim, either child or adult. This trauma has the term post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a mental health illness that can develop in those who have watched or experienced a terrible incident, include sexual abuse. The symptoms of PTSD include intrusive memories, flashbacks, nightmares, avoiding trauma reminders, poor mood and cognitive changes, and hyper arousal (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Meanwhile the signs of long-term trauma, according to research, are excessive anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, substance abuse, and relationship difficulties (Greenfeld, 1997; Briere & Elliott, 2003).

Despite the fact that sexual abuse is common, it is evident that many incidences of sexual abuse go unreported. This makes it less likely that all cases of sexual abuse will be collected. Only 34% of sexual assault is reported to law enforcement, according to data by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ, 2013), making it challenging to fully comprehend the effects sexual harassment has on individuals and communities. From this, we can conclude that the issue of sexual abuse can occur in all circles and regardless of gender, age, and cultural origins.

This study uses data from the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, released on September 21, 2012. This film was produced by John Malkovich, Russell Smith, and Lianne Halfon, and Stephen Chbosky wrote the script based on his novel entitled *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. This film, which originates from America, presents a romance genre story from each role in the film. This 103-minute film tells about adolescence and the love story of a boy named Charlie, played by Logan Lerman as the main character in this film. Charlie's character in this film is quiet, shy, introverted, and a loner. Nevertheless, it turns out that Charlie's characteristics are a form of trauma from the sexual abuse he experienced as a child. Charlie was once a victim of sexual abuse when he was seven years old by his aunt, Aunt Helen. Besides experiencing sexual abuse, Charlie has also witnessed Derek's abusive behavior towards Candace, Charlie's older sister. Plus Charlie lost his best friend in middle school because of suicide, this made his trauma even worse in this film (Chbosky, 2012).

This film tells about past traumas, friendships, and the teenage love life experienced by each of the characters in the film, which are very different. Long story short, the quiet Charlie finally manages to have friends named Patrick, played by Ezra Miller, and Sam, played by Emma Watson. However, behind it all, Charlie and Sam have something in common dark experiences related to sexual abuse as a child. Charlie had been sexually abused by his aunt when he was seven years old, while Sam also

experienced the same thing as a child, which his father's friend did. Their past experiences have affected all aspects of their lives, including romance. On the other hand, Charlie and Sam address their trauma differently.

Since this movie mainly talks about childhood trauma, the researcher decided to analyze it using a book by Peter A. Levine *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past: A Practical Guide for Understanding and Working with Traumatic Memory* (Levine, 2015). Peter A. Levine is a psychologist and writer specializing in trauma and somatic. Through his research, he has written many books. However, several works on trauma are popular and very influential in the field of psychology, there are *Walking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*, *Healing Trauma: A Pioneering Program for Restoring the Freedom of Your Body*, *In an Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*, and *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for the Living Past: A Practical Guide for Understanding and Working with Traumatic Memory*. He has dedicated his life and career to learning about how trauma affects the body and how it heals.

Levine's work emphasizes the importance of overcoming trauma because it does not only affect psychologically but also affects physically (Levine, 2015). Levine explains that a person's body can instinctively heal trauma by letting go of the traumatic experience and allowing instinctual responses when threatened. Levine developed a therapeutic approach, Somatic Experiencing, focusing on the body's instinctive ability to heal from trauma. Levine's work has had such an enormous impact on trauma therapy that therapists and practitioners have used it worldwide to provide hope for healing for those who have experienced trauma. It has also helped build awareness about how trauma affects the human body.

According to Levine in his book *Trauma and Memory*, memory consists of two parts: explicit and implicit. Explicit memory is the memory we consciously remember, such as life experiences, what we did today, the names of people we met and so on. Meanwhile, implicit memory is the memory that we remember subconsciously or outside our heads, such as how to button our clothes, ride a bicycle, tie our shoelaces, feel angry, happy, sad, embarrassed, and so on. Levine emphasized that traumatic experiences lie in implicit memory. According to Levine, there are five core elements of traumatic memory, abbreviated SIBAM (Sensation, Image, Behaviors, Affects, and Meanings) (Levine, 2015).

In this research, researcher will compare how trauma caused by sexual abuse on Charlie and Sam's Characters and compare how the trauma impact their life. This research is a psychological approach emphasizing the *Trauma and Memory*. This study used a descriptive

qualitative approach. The data for this study came from observations of the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012) and from the aspects of cinematography. Other sources included Levine's books, websites, journals, journal reviews, and other pertinent online information.

The first objective of this study is to analyze sexual abuse in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* Movie (2012). The second objective is to reveal their traumatic memories experienced by the characters as a result of sexual abuse in the movie. The third objective is to analyze the impacts of sexual abuse and traumatic memories towards the main characters' life in the movie. This psychological study was important to spread awareness about sexual abuse in society, where many people are not sensitive to sexual abuse and consider it taboo or even normal. Also, this research will remind parents to always monitor their child's environment and relationships because sexual abuse can come from anyone, even close family members. It will have a fatal impact not just on a person's psychological development but its effect on our body or physically. Readers will also understand that people who have experienced the same sexual abuse will implement their trauma in the future in different ways because it all depends on how we cope and heal with the trauma.

This research will be comparing the results of how sexual abuse experienced by the two main characters in the movie *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012), namely Charlie and Sam. The writer will be discussing about sexual abuse, traumatic memory and how it impacts their life. Various factors affect the trauma of Charlie and Sam in this movie that is not just caused by sexual abuse. As told in the film, Charlie experienced other terrible incidents such as his best friend's suicide and he also witnessed his older sister being a victim of violence by her own boyfriend. However, this research only focuses on how the experiences of sexual abuse that have been experienced by the both of them. It should be remembered that the researcher observed obtaining the primary data only from scripts and the aspects of cinematography in the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and did not relate it to the story in the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999).

In this study, the first variable is the sexual abuse experience on the two main characters, namely Charlie and Sam, using Levine's five elements of traumatic memory consisting of sensation, image, behaviors, affects, and meanings, abbreviated as SIBAM. The second variable analyzes what are the traumatic memories experienced by the characters as a result of sexual abuse in the movie. The third variable is how trauma affects Charlie and Sam's lives. As well as the output of this study is to compare each variable and how the difference is between the two characters.

## METHOD

This study uses psychoanalysis from the book by Peter A. Levine "Trauma and Memory" and using the 103-minute film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* as the primary data source. The data will be in the form of film scripts and cinematography. The process of gathering data includes several steps. The primary data source for this study uses the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012). This American film, about a romance drama, was directed by Stephen Chbosky and produced by John Malkovich, Russell Smith, and Lianne Halfon. This film script is an adaptation of the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky. This artistic work contains many dialogues and cinematography that can be studied and analyzed to understand the traumatic memory of sexual abuse and the impact of trauma to the characters in the film.

The researcher followed specific steps in collecting data, including repeatedly watching and observing the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and paying attention to every cinematographic detail. The second data researchers use is the script from the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. After collecting data by watching the movie *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* to the end, the researcher analyzed the data in the following stages. First, the researcher collects data regarding film scripts and cinematography. Second is data observation ensures that the data collected is relevant to the topic discussed and does not exceed the limitations of the researcher. Third, the researcher classifies the data according to the study's research question. Fourth, the researcher analyzes the sexual abuse, traumatic memory, and how the impact of sexual abuse trauma is for both characters using a literary approach from Peter A. Levine's "Trauma and Memory" and trauma theory from Van der Kolk. Lastly, the researcher concludes the comparison between Charlie and Sam from the analysis results.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will answer the research question in chapter two. The researchers only focused on two aspects to make this research more specific. First, analyze the traumatic memory of sexual abuse by the characters Charlie and Sam. Second, analyze the impact of sexual abuse trauma on the character's life in the movie. According to Levine, traumatic memory comprises five elements: sensations, images, behaviors, affects, and meanings or abbreviated as SIBAM. After watching the film many times and collecting data, the researcher found how traumatic memory was due to the sexual abuse experienced by Charlie and Sam in this film. Researchers also found out how the trauma that Charlie and Sam

experienced affected their life in the film. With the data found (screenshots of cinematography and dialogues from the script) in the film, the researcher hopes that the research questions can be solved.

### 1. Sexual Abuse Experienced by the Characters in the Movie

In this study, researchers analyzed the sexual abuse experienced by Charlie and Sam's characters. It is known that both of them had experienced a traumatic experience, specifically sexual abuse when they were children. The researcher collected data regarding the experiences of sexual abuse of the two characters from the script and cinematography told in the film either implicitly or explicitly.

#### 1.1 Charlie Experienced Sexual Abuse by Aunt Helen

In this film, it is told that Charlie has an aunt named Helen who is very close to Charlie. When Charlie was little, Aunt Helen was the closest person to him. In Charlie's eyes, Aunt Helen was a strong woman who inspired Charlie. Nevertheless, in the film, Aunt Helen dies when she takes a birthday present for Charlie in the New Year's Eve. It also made Charlie feel very guilty for the death of Aunt Helen. After watching this film three times, the researcher realized that this film contained elements of sexual abuse perpetrated by Aunt Helen against Charlie, which was told implicitly through cinematography and Aunt Helen's past dialogues against Charlie. This made Charlie's life in his teens experience symptoms of trauma which made Charlie always remember those glimpses of his traumatic memory or flashbacks. From the cinematic flashback, the researcher collects data on sexual abuse committed by Aunt Helen against Charlie.



**Data 1 (Charlie's flashback during New Year's Eve, at 53:40)**

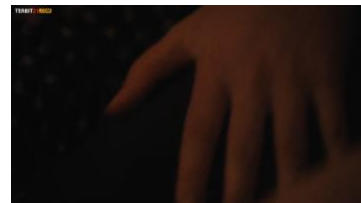
*CHARLIE'S STREET - NIGHT (FLASHBACK) In a QUICK FLASH*

*We see 7 year old Charlie with Aunt Helen on Christmas Eve. She bends to whisper in his ear  
AUNT HELEN: It'll be our little secret, all right?  
(Data 1)*

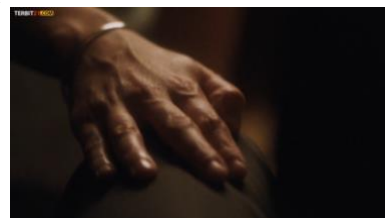
The researcher found an implicit story about sexual abuse committed by Aunt Helen towards Charlie. When in

the scene when Charlie is at a party celebrating New Year's Eve with his friends, he has a flashback because he was triggered by the atmosphere of New Year's Eve. Because the traumatic memory due to the sexual abuse committed by Aunt Helen also occurred on New Year's Eve on his seventh birthday. The scene shown in Data 1 is a flashback that Charlie experienced during New Year's Eve. In Data 1, it can be seen that the cinematography uses close up shots which liven up the atmosphere of an intimate conversation between the two actors. Aunt Helen whispered something to Charlie "It'll be our little secret, all right?" which led to the sexual abuse that Aunt Helen had committed to Charlie when he was a child. Based on elements of traumatic memory by Levine (2015), data 1 shows one of the 5 elements of traumatic memory, namely Images in the form of flashbacks that appear because of the trigger of the Christmas atmosphere which reminds Charlie of the sexual abuse that Aunt Helen did to him at Christmas when he was 7 years old.

The researcher also found other implicit evidence regarding sexual abuse committed by Aunt Helen against Charlie through Charlie's traumatic memory in this film. In the scene where Sam is kissing Charlie and Sam starts holding his thigh (Data 2), Charlie stops kissing and is startled; as Charlie suddenly stops, Sam asks him, "What's wrong Charlie?" then Charlie answers, "Oh, nothing" while he trying to cover up what he was feeling then continued kissing Sam. This was because Charlie felt that Sam's touch was similar to the sexual abuse Aunt Helen did to him as a child.



**Data 2 (Sam touch Charlie's knee at 1:26:50)**



**Data 3 Charlie's flashback Aunt Helen touch his knee at 1:28:41)**

*INT. SAM'S BEDROOM – NIGHT*

*QUICK FLASH... Charlie remembers the night with Sam.*

*We see her put her hand on his knee. The image moves up the arm.*

*To the shoulder. To the face. And we reveal, we are not in Sam's bedroom. And it is not Sam touching Charlie. But... Aunt Helen*

*AUNT HELEN: Don't wake your sister. (Data 2)*

By reading the film script, the researcher gets more details regarding the evidence that Aunt Helen was the cause of the trauma that occurred to Charlie as a result of the sexual abuse that was perpetrated on Charlie. Based on Data 2 and 3, the script snippet proves that Charlie compares the touch of Sam and Aunt Helen, which he feels the same. Another piece of evidence implicitly showing that Aunt Helen sexually abused Charlie was when after Aunt Helen touched Charlie's knee, she said, "Don't wake your sister" because she did not want Candace to find out what she was doing to Charlie.

According to Peter A. Levine, the memory of the touch between Sam and Aunt Helen experienced by Charlie is one of the characteristics of trauma namely intrusive memories, it is an experiences of recurrent and distressing memories or images associated with the traumatic event as if they were replaying the traumatic memory. Intrusive memory can occur because of small things that trigger someone with a traumatic memory, such as touch, smell, feeling, sound, and others. Disturbing memories are manifested in the form of vivid flashbacks or nightmares (Levine, 2015). In the film, Charlie remembers the trauma of the sexual abuse that Aunt Helen did to him because Sam touched him as a trigger. Following Van der Kolk's trauma theory, what Charlie experienced were symptoms of traumatic memory, namely re-experiencing, where the traumatic memories of Charlie that appeared were in the form of flashbacks and psychological pressure when remembering the traumatic event (Van der Kolk, 2014).



**Data 4 (The doctor tells them what Aunt Helen did to Charlie, at 1:34:00)**

*CHARLIE (V.O.)*

*The worst day was the time my doctor told my mom and dad what Aunt Helen did to me. In the distance, we see Charlie's mom and dad stop. Shocked.*  
(Data 4)

The last most accurate evidence found in the script in Data 4 by the researcher is when the scene Charlie is in a mental hospital. Finally, he tells everything that Aunt Helen did to him to the psychiatrist that Aunt Helen had sexually abused him when he was a child. In Data 4,

Charlie's parents were very surprised that the doctor told Charlie all the traumatic memories about Aunt Helen's sexual abuse of their child Charlie.

**1.2 Sam Experienced Sexual Abuse by her Father's Boss**



**Data 5 (Charlie finally speaks from the heart to Sam, at 1:25:37)**

*CHARLIE: I know who you are, Sam.*

*Sam waits. And Charlie finally speaks from the heart.*

*CHARLIE (CONT'D) I know I'm quiet, and I know I should speak more, but if you knew the things that were in my head most of the time, you'd know what it really meant. How much we are alike. And how we've been through the same things. And you're not small. You're beautiful. (Data 5)*

There is a implicit evidence that approves if Sam had the same dark past as Charlie regarding sexual abuse was when Charlie finally talked deeply with Sam about his feelings for Sam so far. From the script in Data 5, Charlie said, "but if you knew the things that were in my head most of the time, you'd know what it really meant. How much we are alike. And how we've been through the same things. And you're not small. You're beautiful." which implicitly means that Charlie and Sam have something in common. That is, they both experienced sexual abuse when they were children

**2. Traumatic Memory Experienced by the Characters in the Movie**

In this study, researchers analyzed the sexual traumatic memory experienced by Charlie and Sam's characters. It is known that both of them had experienced a traumatic experience, specifically sexual abuse when they were children. The researcher collected data regarding the experiences of traumatic memory of the two characters from the script and cinematography told in the film either implicitly or explicitly.

**2.1 Traumatic Memory Experienced by Charlie**



**Data 6 (Charlie's vision started to blur, at 53:15)**

*INT. BOB'S HOUSE - NIGHT (PRESENT)*

*We are BACK TO PRESENT as Charlie takes a deep breath and tries to remember that he's at a New Year's party.*

*PATRICK: 7-6-5-4-3-2-1. Happy New Year! The crowd cheers, leaving ghosts of themselves. Charlie gets up from the sofa and walks out of Bob's house. Charlie walks down the road under a streetlight. Silhouette. The road is icy. Charlie lays down and starts moving his arms in the snow. The memories begin to haunt him. (Data 6)*

After experiencing the flashback in the Data 1, Charlie felt like his soul tossed around, disconnected from his surroundings, and his vision start to blurry in Data 6 which uses long shot cinematography as if to show the whole situation that was in front of Charlie. Charlie felt like he was in a dream that was not real, even though he was at a New Year's Eve party with his friends. As shown in Data 6 obtained from the film script "The crowd cheers, leaving ghosts of themselves" shows that Charlie feels like his environment is unreal or dreamy. After experiencing flashbacks and dissociation, the next scene is Charlie in the hospital because the police found him lying on the street. The scene that immediately jumps out that Charlie is in the hospital after the scene of Charlie's flashback at the turn of New Year's Eve, shows that the dissociation that Charlie is experiencing leads to a blackout. Dissociation are disconnection from thoughts, feelings, or identity such as daydreaming, being disconnected from the body or surroundings, or experiencing glimpse of traumatic memories (Van der Kolk, 2014). In this case, Charlie's flashbacks cause him to dissociate due to a very heavy traumatic memory about Aunt Helen who sexual abused him.



**Data 7 (Charlie at Hospital after Blackout at 54:50)**

*CHARLIE: Well, um... I was really tired, and uh... I was feeling feverish. So, I went outside for a walk, just to get some cold air. And I started seeing things. So, I passed out. He waits to see if this worked. And then, unexpectedly...*

*MOTHER: (worried) You're seeing things again, Charlie?*

*CHARLIE: (oops) Not, uh... Not really. (Data 7)*

From data 7, Charlie let slip, "And I started seeing things" during police interrogation at the hospital. Reinforcing the validation that Charlie is having flashbacks. From the script and cinematography observed, the researcher concluded that the flashbacks that Charlie experienced on New Year's Eve were symptoms of trauma which, according to Levine, were intrusive memories, that is when individuals experience recurrent and distressing memories or images associated with the traumatic event as if they were replaying the traumatic memory. Intrusive memory can occur because of small things that trigger someone with a traumatic memory, such as touch, smell, feeling, sound, and others (Brewin et al., 2010). In Charlie's case, he experienced flashbacks because he was triggered by the atmosphere of New Year's Eve, a traumatic memory event that Aunt Helen did to him at the turn of New Year's Eve.

**2.2 Traumatic Memory Experienced by Sam**

In this film, it is told that Sam's character, Charlie's female friend, whom he likes, has also experienced sexual abuse. It is explicitly told in Charlie and Sam's dialogue that Sam's first kiss was his father's boss when he was eleven years old. Sam said that his father's boss often came to his house, which meant that she was often sexually abused by her father's boss when she was little.



**Data 8 (Sam shared his experience of sexual abuse to Charlie, at 45:16)**

*SAM: Have you ever kissed a girl?*

*CHARLIE: No. What about you?*

*SAM: Have I ever kissed a girl?*

*CHARLIE: (laughs) No! Your first kiss...*

*Sam gets this strange look in her eyes. A little haunted.*

*SAM: My first kiss? I was 11. His name was Robert. He would come over to the house all the time.*

*CHARLIE: Was he your first boyfriend?*

*SAM: He was my dad's boss. (Data 8)*

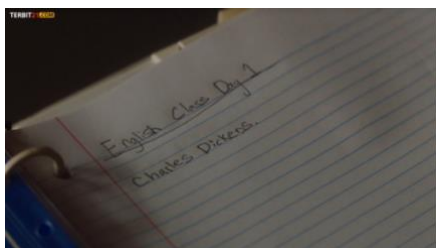
In the script of Data 8 shows the dialogue about how Sam told Charlie that she had experienced sexual abuse by her own father's boss. Sam shared that her first kiss was when she was eleven years old with Robert, her father's boss, who often came to the house. This includes the traumatic memory of sexual abuse experienced by Sam when she was a child. This film always tells explicitly how Sam has experienced the traumatic memory of sexual abuse. According to Levine (2015), the sexual abuse that was a traumatic memory experienced by Sam became part of her explicit memory which he remembered consciously in his long term memory. in contrast to Charlie's character, who is always implicitly told in the movie that he was a victim of sexual abuse by his aunt.

### 3. The Impacts of Sexual Abuse Trauma on the Character's Life in the Movie

After analyzing the elements of sexual abuse against the characters Charlie and Sam in the film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the next step is for researchers to analyze how the impact of sexual abuse trauma on the lives of each character, Charlie and Sam, in the film. The researcher will describe some evidence found regarding cinematography and film scripts in this sub-chapter

#### 3.1 The Impacts of Sexual Abuse Trauma on the Charlie's Life in the Movie

The researcher found that the first impact of the trauma of sexual abuse in Charlie was most visible in the film. Charlie grew up a quiet child, shy, hard to get along with, and felt his surroundings ignored and neglected him.



**Data 9 (Charlie write his answer in the book, at 06:11)**

*BILL (CONT'D)*

*Why didn't you raise your hand? (off Charlie's shrug)*  
*They call you teacher's pet? Freak? (off Charlie's nod)*  
*I used to get spaz. I mean, come on, spaz? (Data 9)*

On the first day of school, Charlie is a quiet and shy boy. When in English class, the teacher held a quiz asking students whether anyone knows who the author of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is. Everyone in the class asked questions, no one knew. However, it can be seen

from the extreme close-up shot that Charlie wrote the answer in his book, namely Charles Dickens (Data 9) and the lecturer turned out to say that the answer was in accordance with what he wrote that the answer was correct, but from this the researcher identified that Charlie was quiet and shy to answer in public.

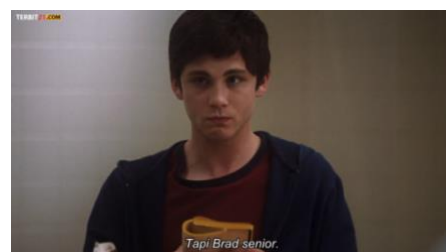


**Data 10 (Charlie write his answer in the book, at 02:36)**

*CHARLIE (V.O.)*

*I hope it's okay for me to think that. You see, I haven't really talked to anyone outside of my family all summer. Charlie moves to the living room where dad watches a football game. Mom reads a page turner and sips her white wine. Charlie waits for them to notice him. And waits. And waits. (Data10)*

Researchers also found explicit evidence that Charlie is a quiet person. In the voiceover script for Charlie (Data 10), he says to himself that he never spoke to anyone but his family all summer. Even Charlie spoke to his family in moderation. "Charlie waits for them to notice him. And waits. And waits" The script in Data 10 shows that Charlie is reluctant to start a conversation even with his family. Apart from being at home, Charlie is also very quiet at school. He had a hard time getting along on the first day of school. In this case, Charlie experienced difficulty in forming and maintaining relationships which resulted in the worsening quality of family relationships (Jones et al., 2012).



**Data 11 (Charlie sit alone in the cafeteria, at 03:33)**  
*INT. CAFETERIA - LATER 8*

*Charlie sits in the corner alone, observing everyone having a great time with their friends. He sees a pretty girl with blonde hair having the best first day. This is SUSAN, 14. CHARLIE (V.O.)*

*When my sister said no, I thought maybe my old friend Susan would want to have lunch with me.*

*Charlie catches her eye and waves, but she looks away. And then there's Brad Hays, who's the quarterback of our team. Before my brother went to play football for Penn State, he and Brad played together. So, I thought maybe he'd say hi to me. But Brad's a senior, and I'm me, so... who am I kidding?* (Data 11)

From the voice-over script for Charlie's character, it is told that Charlie does not have friends for lunch at the canteen; even his older sister Candace, his junior high school friend Susan, and his brother's friend Brad do not want to greet and eat together with Charlie. In Data 20, Charlie says, "I thought maybe he'd say hi to me. But Brad's a senior, and I'm me, so... who am I kidding?" from there, the researcher analyzed that Charlie grew up to be a child who was difficult to get along with and felt ignored by his surroundings.



**Data 12 (Charlie's felt that no one knew him, at 26:22)**

*PATRICK: Everyone. Raise your glasses to Charlie. Charlie looks up. A little paranoid. Everyone is staring.*

*CHARLIE: What did I do?*

*PATRICK: You didn't do anything. We just want to toast our new friend. (off his look) You see things. And you understand. You're a wallflower.*

*Charlie dries his sweaty hands on his pants. He looks around the room at the nods and friendly faces.*

*PATRICK: What is it? What's wrong?*

*CHARLIE: I was thinking no one noticed me.*

(Data 12)

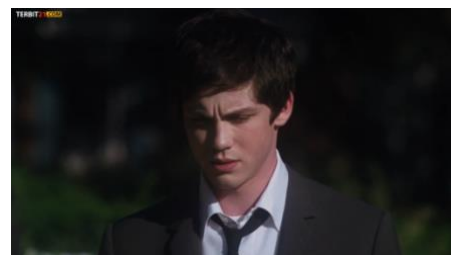
In Data 12, Patrick calls everyone in the party to toast Charlie. But Charlie said "I was thinking no one noticed me", Charlie felt that so far no one had paid attention to him. According to Van der Kolk, what Charlie experienced was one of the symptoms of traumatic memory. These are destructive beliefs about oneself and the world, such as blaming oneself, lack of interest in activities, and feeling separate from others. This happens because of the beliefs in people who experience trauma, such as destructive beliefs about themselves and the world, blaming themselves, lack of interest in activities, feeling

separate from others, and feeling no right in something (Van der Kolk, 2014).

The following impact of sexual abuse trauma on Charlie is related to Charlie's physical appearance. According to Levine, trauma does not only affect a person's psychology but can affect a person's physique. In the film, Charlie is often seen wrinkling his eyebrows, raising his eyebrows, glancing at his eyes unsteadily, or moving his mouth irregularly. This always happens when Charlie talks to the other person or thinks to himself.



**Data 13 (Charlie's facial expression habits, at 7:00)**



**Data 14 (Charlie's facial expression habits, at 1:28:36)**

In Data 13 and 14, it can be seen from the close-up shot that Charlie always makes an unnatural facial expression when talking or silent. According to Peter A. Levine, traumatic memory usually manifests in physical sensations that appear in the body, such as a racing heart, tightness in the chest, sweating, unstable eye direction, and other bodily responses. The earlier symptoms were traumatic memory, abbreviated as SIBAM (Levine, 2015). Charlie's behavior has been included in his implicit memory, precisely in the procedural memory section, namely a body memory or everyday physical activity that we unconsciously remember that has become our daily habit (Levine, 2015). Another impact of the trauma that happened to Charlie was that Charlie became a very reluctant person and did not want to disappoint other people. In the film, Charlie does not want to make his parents worry about him, he also cannot refuse love from someone he does not love, and he is willing to see Sam dating someone else even though he likes Sam.





**Data 15 (Charlie fixes his book, at 07:53)**

*CHARLIE (V.O.)*

*If my parents ask me about it, I probably won't tell them the truth because I don't want them to worry that I might get bad again. (Data 15)*

In Data 15, Charlie repairs his teacher's book in close-up shot, which was torn due to being bullied on his first day of school. From Charlie's voiceover in Data 25, "I don't want them to worry that I might get bad again", Charlie does not want his parents to know that he is being bullied at school because he does not want them to worry about him.



**Data 16 (Charlie in Mayview Hospital, at 07:53)**

*CHARLIE: Where am I?*

*DR. BURTON: Mayview hospital.*

*This news hits Charlie hard. He begins to panic.*

*CHARLIE: You have to let me go. My dad can't afford it.*

*DR. BURTON: Don't worry about that.*

*CHARLIE: No. I saw them when I was little. And I don't want to be a Mayview kid. Just tell me how to stop it. (Data 16)*

In Data 16, Charlie was very anxious and worried when he knew he was admitted to the Mayview mental hospital after experiencing a suicide attempt and blackout. Charlie said, "You have to let me go. My dad cannot afford it" he was worried it would inconvenience his father and family. He also does not want to be labelled as Mayview's child. Charlie does not like to make others feel burdened by it, even by things other than himself. People like this are people pleasers who do not want to upset or disappoint others. A people pleaser puts aside his desires so that he can be liked and does not disappoint others by agreeing and agreeing with all the opinions and invitations of others

(Alden, 2013). It is not uncommon for people pleasers to lie about their feelings and thoughts to be accepted by others.



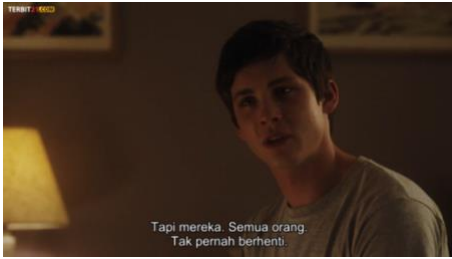
**Data 17 (Charlie is dating Mary Elizabeth, at 1:03:30)**

*CHARLIE (V.O.)*

*I probably should have been honest about how I didn't want to go out with Mary Elizabeth after Sadie's, but I really didn't want to hurt her feelings. I just wish I could have found another way to break up. In hindsight, I probably could not have picked a worse way to be honest with Mary Elizabeth. (Data 17)*

Researchers found other evidence that Charlie was a people pleaser when he was forced to accept love from Mary Elizabeth and date her (Data 17). When Charlie said "but I really didn't want to hurt her feelings. I just wish I could have found another way to break up. In hindsight, I probably could not have picked a worse way to be honest with Mary Elizabeth" Charlie did not want to hurt Mary Elizabeth, even though he wanted to break up, but Charlie still left his relationship with Mary Elizabeth. This made Charlie unable to be honest with his thoughts and feelings. People who are people pleasers have difficulty setting boundaries (Alden, 2013), similar to what Charlie experienced. He could not limit Mary Elizabeth from being his girlfriend; on the other hand, Charlie liked Sam, not Mary Elizabeth. Charlie had to try to love Mary Elizabeth the way he loved Sam. However, a forced feeling causes Charlie to become even more tormented.

Another impact of Charlie's sexual abuse trauma is that Charlie becomes a person who always thinks about the feelings or suffering experienced by other people. This happened because of the intense trauma he had experienced, so he was more sensitive to people and the environment around him. Charlie does not want other people to suffer like him, and he is even willing to keep what he wants for the pleasure of others.



**Data 18 (Charlie explain his feeling to the doctor, at 1:32:19)**

*CHARLIE: Seeing it. All their lives. All the time.*

*Just... how do you stop seeing it?*

*DR. BURTON: Seeing what, Charlie? Charlie breaks.*

*CHARLIE: There is so much pain. And I don't know how to not notice it.*

*DR. BURTON: What's hurting you?*

*CHARLIE: No! Not me. It's them. It's everyone. It never stops. Do you understand?*

*(Data 18)*

Data 18 is when Charlie was in the Mayview mental hospital after he experienced a suicide attempt and blackout. This is the peak where Charlie really cannot stop thinking about other people's suffering. When Charlie says in Data 18, "There is so much pain. And I don't know how to not notice it," it means that Charlie is very sensitive to the problems that other people are going through. It is slowly torturing him mentally because all this time, he has been trying to please people by putting aside their desires and hiding things that have the potential to burden others. Even Charlie felt guilty for the bad things that happened to other people.

Charlie also experienced the impact of sexual abuse committed by Aunt Helen against him, namely flashbacks because of the little things that triggered Charlie about the figure of Aunt Helen.



**Data 19 (Candace open the door, at 16:19)**



**Data 20 (Charlie's flashback about Aunt Helen, at 16:13)**

**INT. ENTRY HALL - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)**

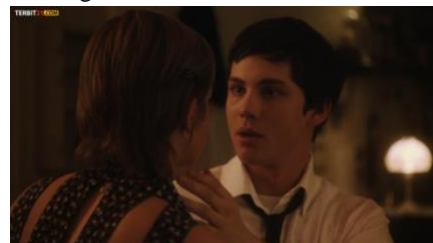
*The door opens to reveal Charlie's mom and AUNT HELEN entering the house. Little Charlie stands at the top of the stairs with his brother and sister in their Sunday clothes.*

**INT. ENTRY HALL - NIGHT (PRESENT)**

*Charlie stands at the top of the stairs as Candace enters the house. She is startled when she sees Charlie. (Data 19)*

When Charlie finds Candace, Charlie's older sister, being subjected to inappropriately violent behavior by her boyfriend Derek, Charlie is immediately reminded of Aunt Helen's being subjected to the same behavior by her boyfriend. Charlie has flashbacks of little things when Candace enters the door and reminds Charlie of Aunt Helen. Charlie had a flashback when Aunt Helen entered the house door too. Charlie, still seven years old, welcomed Aunt Helen's arrival to celebrate a birthday party and New Year's Eve with his family. On that day was an incident of sexual abuse by Aunt Helen due to little Charlie. According to Van der Kolk, what Charlie experienced corresponds to one of the SIBAM traumatic memory symptoms. The flashbacks experienced by Charlie are e-experiencing symptoms, namely trauma memories that reappear, flashbacks, nightmares, or psychological pressure when remembering the traumatic event (Van der Kolk, 2014).

Another impact of the sexual abuse trauma experienced by Charlie is that he feels traumatized by sexual activity even though he is having sexual activity with the person he loves. This was found by researchers in Data 4 when Sam touched Charlie's knee, and in Data 5 flashback Charlie when Aunt Helen touched his thigh, and this triggered him to sexually abuse Aunt Helen when Sam did the same thing.



**Data 21 (Charlie stop kissing Sam, at 1:26:53)**

*When Sam touches him, Charlie pulls away from her. Shocked. Like he's seen a ghost. It hits Charlie like freezing water.*

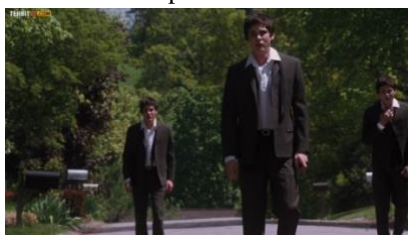
*SAM: What's wrong, Charlie?*

*CHARLIE: Oh, ah... nothing. Charlie shakes off whatever was bothering him and continues. (Data 21)*

From Data 21, the researchers know that Charlie felt a glitch of traumatic memory or flashback when Sam

touched Charlie's thigh while kissing. Charlie remembers Aunt Helen's Touch when she sexually abused her. This shocks Charlie, and he stops kissing Sam abruptly until Sam asks Charlie, "What's wrong, Charlie?" Charlie tries to act normal, hides his feelings, and returns to kissing her. What Charlie experienced corresponds to one of the effects of traumatic memory, as described by Levine on Intrusive memory, that is when the individual experiences recurrent and distressing memories or images associated with the traumatic event as if they were replaying the traumatic memory. Intrusive memory can occur because of small things that trigger someone with a traumatic memory, such as touch, smell, feeling, sound, and others (Levine, 2015).

In this case, Charlie experiences an intrusive memory because Sam's touch triggers a reminder of Aunt Helen. In this case, Charlie also experiences symptoms of trauma, namely avoidance symptoms are attempts to avoid all parts of the traumatic event, including places, people, and activities that trigger memories of the traumatic event (Vander Kolk, 2014). When Charlie realized his activities with Sam were similar to what Aunt Helen was doing, he immediately stopped kissing Sam. Researchers also found another impact of the trauma caused by the sexual abuse experienced by Charlie, namely that he often felt anxiety, so he attempted suicide and ended up becoming a patient at the Mayview mental hospital.



**Data 22 (Charlie feel anxiety, at 1:29:11)**



**Data 23 (Charlie Banging his head against the door, at 1:29:21)**

*SUBURBAN STREET – MORNING*

*Charlie walks down the street. His eyes far away. The images and memories are short, violent bursts. If you've never had an anxiety attack, this is how it feels. Charlie walks toward us on the sidewalk. We see him through a long lens. His image fractures. We see him in different planes of the image. He's beginning to break apart. One image. Two images. We see Charlie fracturing. The pieces scattered. Out of focus. Lost.*

*He's all over the frame. Charlie is in the same entry hall in the same house 8 years later. Banging his head against the door. "It's my fault. It's all my fault."*

After Sam and Patrick left home to wander and attend college, Charlie began feeling anxiety creeping into his mind. From Data 22, this film wants to convey a picture of anxiety to the audience through the displayed cinematics. In Data 22, Charlie is seen splitting into three people, which shows Charlie's mixed feelings and anxiety. The data the researchers got from the film script, namely "If you've never had an anxiety attack, this is how it feels", proves that Charlie is experiencing anxiety. A mental health condition called anxiety is characterized by excessive concern and dread. When someone has anxiety, they will naturally find a means to handle it. Anxiety results from feeling uneasy, restless, annoyed, and intimidated by a situation. However, the root reason for worry is not often apparent or understood. In Data 23, Charlie is seen banging his head right on the door of his house while saying, "It's my fault. It's all my fault." which means that Charlie blames himself for what has happened to other people.



**Data 24 (Charlie feel anxiety, at 1:29:44)**



**Data 25 (Charlie feel anxiety, at 1:29:32)**

*Charlie thinks everyone is staring at him. His sister and her friends. His brother and mother. Mary Elizabeth and Alice. And worst of all... Sam and Patrick the night they toasted him. A paranoid nightmare. (Data 25)*

From Data 24 and 25, the audience can see Charlie's expressions and emotions from close up. When Charlie is experiencing anxiety the cinematography depicts that Charlie is in a state of anxiety. His heart was pounding, worried, sweaty, and dizzy. The physical impact experienced by Charlie during this anxiety is included in

the element of traumatic memory, namely sensation; Traumatic memories usually manifest in physical sensations that appear in the body, such as a racing heart, tightness in the chest, sweating, and other bodily responses (Levine, 2015). This is also commonly referred to as a panic attack or panic disorder, which is a sudden reaction with fear or great discomfort that causes several physical and cognitive symptoms such as sweating, racing heart, and shaking hands (Kessler, 2006).

At data 25, Charlie feels everyone looks at him as if blaming him for everything that's happened. During this scene, Charlie's anxiety begins to explode, and eventually, he ends up trying to kill himself. The feeling Charlie feels when he thinks everyone is staring and blaming him is an element of traumatic memory called meaning, which means a belief or point of view about how to see oneself, other people, and the whole world due to an event of traumatic experiences (Levine, 2015). Charlie has a bad view of himself and those around him; he thinks the people around him judged him by how sexually assaulted he was.

### 3.2 The Impacts of Sexual Abuse Trauma on the Sam's Life in the Movie

Researchers found the impact of the experience of sexual abuse experienced by Sam. At school, Sam grew up to be a cheerful and sociable child. However, on the other hand, Sam tells Charlie the truth directly and explicitly about how he has felt so far regarding his love relationship. Sam admits that she feels humiliated and small. She also feels always being dumped by the man she loves.



#### Data 26 (Sam shared her experience, at 45:25)

*SAM: You know Charlie, I used to sleep with guys who treated me like shit. And get wasted all the time. But now... I feel like I have a chance. I could even get into a real college.*

*CHARLIE: It's true. You can do it. (Data 26)*

The experience of sexual abuse that Sam experienced when he was a child turned out to greatly affect Sam's thoughts and love life. From Data 26, it can be seen that Sam said, "I used to sleep with guys who treated me like shit and got wasted all the time." From the script fragment, the researcher analyzed that Sam always felt fine and deserved to be treated badly by men who had dated her.

What Sam was thinking about was one of the elements of traumatic memory or SIBAM, which Peter A. Levine coined. Sam experiences symptoms meanings, namely beliefs or points of view about how to see yourself, others, and the whole world from the results of a traumatic experience. In this case, Sam has an implicit belief in his memory that she is despicable and deserves to be treated badly by other men, including his boyfriend or loved ones. Sam also has a point of view of how to see herself as a small and despicable person.



#### Data 27 (Sam expressed her feelings, at 1:24:45)

*SAM: I had lunch with Craig today.*

*CHARLIE: Yeah?*

*SAM: He said he was sorry, and that I was right to break up with him. But I'm driving away, and I just felt so small. Just asking myself why do I and everyone I love pick people who treat us like we're nothing?*

*CHARLIE: We accept the love we think we deserve. (Data 27)*

After Sam broke up with Craig, she felt even smaller. She always received bad treatment from someone she loved. The evidence obtained by the researchers was contained in Data 27 when Sam said, "And I just felt so small. Just asking myself, why do I and everyone I love pick people who treat us like we're nothing?" According to the teacher's message, Charlie also answered, "We accept the love we think we deserve". This means that all this time, Sam felt she deserved to be treated badly because she saw her as a despised person due to the sexual abuse trauma she had experienced. because Sam feels like he is always treated badly by all the men, he feels he is small and worthless. This condition is also called negative cognitions and mood, which is one of the symptoms of trauma where the victim has bad beliefs or views of themselves and the world around them (Van Der Kolk, 2014).

## CLOSING

### Conclusion

Based on the researchers' findings regarding sexual abuse which became a traumatic memory and make an impact for Charlie and Sam, the researchers concluded several things. First, Charlie experienced sexual abuse by

his aunt, Aunt Helen, which is implicitly told in the film through several flashbacks. First, on Charlie's seventh birthday on New Year's Eve, Aunt Helen sexually abused Charlie. Second, when Sam touched Charlie's thigh, which made Charlie flashback the sexual abuse that Aunt Helen committed against him. Sam also experienced sexual abuse by her father's boss, Robert, which is explained explicitly in this film that Robert have ever kissed Sam when she was eleven. traumatic memories that

Second, Charlie often experienced with several triggers, this makes every New Year's Eve celebration is a trigger for Charlie's traumatic memories which always reminded him of the sexual abuse that Aunt Helen committed against him. On the other hand, Sam tells Charlie about her traumatic memory with Robert when she was eleven.

Third, the impact of the trauma of sexual abuse on Charlie's character is that he becomes a child who is shy, quiet, has difficulty getting along, feels unknown to the people around him, becomes a person who likes to please other people, gets anxious easily, has panic attacks and often gets flashbacks with memories. traumatic, traumatized by sexual activity even with people he loves. The worst result of the trauma that was visible on Charlie's physical appearance was that he experienced behavioral problems with facial expressions, such as always frowning and raising his forehead, unstable eye direction, and strange mouth movements. The impact of sexual harassment on Sam's character is that he feels she deserves to be treated badly by every man she loves, and she doesn't deserve good love. This is because Sam has bad thoughts about herself, and she feels humiliated, worthless, and small after the tragedy of sexual abuse she experienced.

### Suggestions

Further research is needed to continue to develop and improve interventions for trauma, with a focus on increasing access to care for all characters affected by traumatic events. Various factors influence Charlie and Sam's trauma in this film which is not only caused by sexual abuse. As told in the film, Charlie also experienced other terrible events such as his best friend committing suicide and he also witnessed his older sister becoming a victim of violence perpetrated by her own boyfriend. The film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* can be studied by other researchers in the future using other theories about the complexity of youth, human identity, LGBTQ, introvertness, and existential crisis.

### REFERENCES

Levine, P. A. (2015). *Trauma and memory: Brain and body in a search for the living past: A practical guide*

*for understanding and working with traumatic memory*. North Atlantic Books.

Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Penguin.

World Health Organization. (2002). *The world health report 2002: reducing risks, promoting healthy life*. World Health Organization.

Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., Smith, S. G., Walters, M. L., Merrick, M. T., & Stevens, M. R. (2011). National intimate partner and sexual violence survey. *Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 75*.

Stoltenborgh, M., Van Ijzendoorn, M. H., Euser, E. M., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J. (2011). A global perspective on child sexual abuse: Meta-analysis of prevalence around the world. *Child maltreatment, 16*(2), 79-101.

Pereda, N., Guilera, G., & Forns, M. Gomez--Benito, J.(2009). The prevalence of child sexual abuse in community and student samples: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review, 29*(4).

Bovin, M. J., Marx, B. P., Weathers, F. W., Gallagher, M. W., Rodriguez, P., Schnurr, P. P., & Keane, T. M. (2016). Psychometric properties of the PTSD checklist for diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders—fifth edition (PCL-5) in veterans. *Psychological assessment, 28*(11), 1379.

Greenfeld, L. A. (1997). *Sex offenses and offenders: An analysis of data on rape and sexual assault*. US Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

Rennison, C. M. (2002). *Rape and sexual assault: Reporting to police and medical attention, 1992-2000*.

Septiana Wardani, M., & Thoyibi, M. (2022). *Childhood Traumatic Experience And Its Contribution To Personality Development In Stephen Chbosky The Perks Of Being A Wallflower Novel: A Behaviorists Perspective* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta).

Austriani, F. (2017). *Traumatic Experience Resulting From Sexual Abuse in Stephen Chbosky's The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. *LANTERN (Journal on English Language, Culture and Literature), 6*(1).

Sabila, N. T., & Koiri, M. UNRESOLVED CHILDHOOD TRAUMA IN GERALD'S GAME MOVIE SCRIPT.

Cloitre, M., Stolbach, B. C., Herman, J. L., Kolk, B. V. D., Pynoos, R., Wang, J., & Petkova, E. (2009). A developmental approach to complex PTSD: Childhood and adult cumulative trauma as predictors of symptom complexity. *Journal of traumatic stress, 22*(5), 399-408.

Kessler, R. C., Chiu, W. T., Jin, R., Ruscio, A. M., Shear, K., & Walters, E. E. (2006). The epidemiology of panic attacks, panic disorder, and agoraphobia in the

National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of general psychiatry*, 63(4), 415-424.

Alden, L. E., & Trew, J. L. (2013). If it makes you happy: engaging in kind acts increases positive affect in socially anxious individuals. *Emotion*, 13(1), 64.