Trauma and Insecurity in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*: A Cognitive Psychology Study

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana trauma dan ketidakamanan memengaruhi proses kognitif dan pengambilan keputusan karakter dalam *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, menggunakan psikologi kognitif Aaron Beck sebagai kerangka utama. Dengan fokus pada Giyuu Tomioka dan Akaza, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana pengalaman masa lalu mereka membentuk distorsi kognitif, skema maladaptif, dan mekanisme koping. Data dikumpulkan melalui pembacaan mendalam terhadap elemen visual dan naratif manga, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan item terpilih dari BDI-II dan BAI untuk mengidentifikasi ciri-ciri trauma dan ketidakamanan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa trauma dan ketidakamanan secara mendalam membentuk kognisi dan keputusan karakter. Rasa bersalah Giyuu yang belum terselesaikan atas kematian saudara perempuannya dan Sabito menyebabkan keraguan diri, penarikan diri secara emosional, dan gaya koping yang ditandai oleh penghindaran serta isolasi sosial, meskipun posisinya sebagai Pilar Air. Kehidupan Akaza sebagai Hakuji menampilkan kesedihan yang berlipat-lipat akibat kehilangan ayahnya, Keizou, dan Koyuki, yang mengakibatkan kemarahan yang intens dan gangguan psikologis. Ini memuncak pada amnesia disosiatif setelah dia menjadi iblis, yang menghapus kenangan yang terkait dengan traumanya namun meninggalkan dorongan bawah sadar untuk memperoleh kekuatan guna melindungi diri dari kehilangan lebih lanjut. Di antara para karakter, trauma muncul sebagai katalis bagi keputusan yang merusak atau ketekunan yang rela dilakukan, membentuk perjalanan mereka menuju kepahlawanan atau kehancuran tragis. Kajian ini menyoroti bagaimana kesedihan dan ketidakamanan yang tidak terselesaikan dapat mendistorsi persepsi dan memandu pilihan, memperkaya penggambaran literer tentang rasa bersalah, kerentanan, ketangguhan, dan perjuangan diam di balik kekuatan lahiriah.

Kata Kunci: Trauma; ketidakamanan; pengambilan keputusan; psikologi kognitif

Abstract

This study examines how trauma and insecurity influence the cognitive processes and decision-making of characters in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, using Aaron Beck's cognitive psychology as the primary framework. Focusing on Giyuu Tomioka and Akaza, this research explores how their past experiences shape cognitive distortions, maladaptive schemas, and coping mechanisms. Data were gathered through close reading of the manga's visual and narrative elements, then assessed using selected items from BDI-II and BAI to identify traits of trauma and insecurity. The findings reveal that trauma and insecurity profoundly shape the characters' cognition and decisions. Giyuu's unresolved guilt over his sister's and Sabito's deaths leads to self-doubt, emotional withdrawal, and a coping style marked by avoidance and social isolation, despite his position as the Water Pillar. Akaza's life as Hakuji shows compounded grief from losing his father, Keizou, and Koyuki, resulting in intense rage and psychological decompensation. This culminates in dissociative amnesia after he becomes a demon, erasing memories tied to his trauma yet leaving an unconscious drive for strength to protect against further loss. Across the characters, trauma emerges as a catalyst for either destructive decisions or reluctant perseverance, shaping their journeys toward heroism or tragic downfall. This study highlights how unresolved sorrow and insecurity distort perception and guide choices, enriching the literary portrayal of guilt, vulnerability, resilience, and the silent struggles beneath outward strength.

Keywords: Trauma; insecurity; decision-making; cognitive psychology

INTRODUCTION

Trauma can be defined as a critical event that creates vulnerability and stress. It can threaten one's psychophysical balance (Perrota, 2020). Trauma affects perception and cognition, leading to chronic issues like PTSD. Trauma itself can be a singular event or a cumulative of several events, and may also be transmitted across generations as secondary traumatic stress (Solomon & Zerach, 2020). Trauma often intertwines with insecurity, which involves low self-esteem, self-doubt, and anxiety arising from past experiences, rejection, or unrealistic expectations (Mansell & Gatto, 2022; Maslow, 1942). Insecurity and trauma can disrupt cognitive processes, impairing judgement and decision-making (Young et al., 2020).

Decision-making is a complex interplay of logical reasoning, emotions, and environmental influences (Taherdoost & Madanchian, 2023; Mugan et al., 2024). Complex environments require more cognitive resources, affecting how people balance exploring new options and relying on familiar choices, which can potentially lead to distortions.

In literature, characters' decisions often reflect real psychological processes. This study examines how trauma and insecurity influence decisions in manga, drawing on Aaron Beck's cognitive psychology theory. Manga, a Japanese comic, is globally recognised as literature (Guffey, 2020; Miller, 2002). Its complexity in narratives and illustrations offers rich ground for analysis.

Kimetsu no Yaiba (Demon Slayer) by Koyoharu Gotouge (2016-2020) features characters deeply affected by trauma and insecurity, especially the main character. Set in the *Taisho* Era, it follows Tanjirou Kamado's journey as the main character, along with his sister, Nezuko Kamado. Their quest against demons acts out of trauma: demons were once humans who, driven by fear, grief, or insecurity, chose transformation. Meanwhile, demon slayers train to avenge loved ones or seek safety from discrimination. This interplay of trauma, insecurity, and decision-making underpins character development, highlighting the value of manga in literary and psychological studies.

This study explores how trauma and insecurity disrupt cognition and shape decisions by applying Aaron Beck's cognitive psychological theory to *Kimetsu no Yaiba* as the object. By examining characters' choices, the theoretical understanding of cognitive disruptions in fiction will be enriched. Practically, it offers insights for psychology by highlighting how trauma and insecurity affect decisions in fiction. This approach fosters empathy and a deeper appreciation of coping mechanisms, bridging literature and social awareness while showing how fictional narratives mirror real psychological struggles.

Previous studies on *Kimetsu no Yaiba* have explored its visual, narrative, and thematic richness. Andriani and Anti (2022) identified 10 verbal and 16 visual signs in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*'s posters, showing how colours, character expressions, and symbolic elements convey both denotative meanings and deeper connotative messages, such as struggles between good and evil. Visuals like characters and settings hint at themes and conflicts, while taglines and typography attract attention and enrich meaning.

Ikhtiari and Gandana (2020) analysed Tanjirou Kamado's transformation using Vogler's hero's journey and Weiland's character arc theories. They mapped Tanjirou's progress through key stages: from the "ordinary world" and traumatic call to adventure, to mentorship, repeated tests, ordeal, and final transformation. This journey highlights his shift from self-doubt to resilience, embodying the willing hero with traits like sacrifice, empathy, and determination.

Sowa (2021) examined the manga's themes and structure through existentialism, moral dualism, and humanism. He identified five primary themes: strength, family, nature and duality, good vs evil, humanity and redemption. There are also secondary themes like trauma, friendship, the cycle of violence, and tradition vs change. The narrative centres on Tanjirou and Nezuko's family bond and the recurring conflict between demon slayers and Muzan's demons, illustrating moral dilemmas and the characters' personal growth.

Hidayat and Indarujati (2020) examined trauma in the character Joy from the movie Room using Briere and Scott's trauma types and Jaffe, Segal, and Dumke's symptom framework. They found Joy experienced trauma through physical assault and torture, reflected in physical symptoms like sleep issues and fatigue, emotional symptoms like anxiety and depression, and cognitive symptoms like confusion and memory problems. The study also highlighted treatment through medication and family support.

Umer and Azis (2022) explored trauma and recovery in Ordinary People by analysing Conrad's journey using Herman's three-stage trauma recovery model. They observed Conrad first establishing safety, then processing his trauma through remembrance and mourning, and finally reconnecting with relationships and positive activities, gaining confidence and emotional stability. Their work underlines the importance of social support in overcoming PTSD.

Marwati Rudinto (2022) investigated PTSD causes and coping in Cherry using Davidson's theory. They identified genetic factors, family history of mental illness, stress sensitivity, genetic markers, and environmental causes such as combat exposure, witnessing death, traumatic family environments, lack of support, chronic stress, cultural stigma, and substance abuse. The study linked these causes to varied coping strategies, emphasising how trauma shapes psychological responses.

Overall, research reveals how *Kimetsu no Yaiba* combines striking visuals, layered character arcs, and profound themes. It portrays the protagonist's determined journey to save his sister and defeat demons, while exploring family, humanity, morality, and the clash of good and evil, making it a rich object for both literary and psychological analysis.

Kimetsu no Yaiba, with its complexity, has not been analysed in the psychological field of trauma and insecurity, making it an open opportunity to bridge literature and psychology studies using *Kimetsu no Yaiba*

as an object and focusing on the influence of trauma and insecurity in the characters' decisions by using Beck's framework.

This study applies Beck's theory to analyse how trauma and insecurity shape the main characters' decision-making in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*. Rooted in loss, fear, and discrimination, these experiences form schemas that guide coping behaviours. Maladaptive schemas, in particular, lead to distress and influence choices. Examining these processes reveals how trauma and insecurity disrupt cognition and motivate actions, offering deeper insight into the characters' psychological journeys.

METHOD

Aaron Beck's cognitive theory, introduced in the 1960s, examines how negative thoughts shape depression (Beck, 1964). By focusing on present thoughts and beliefs, Beck made the approach more structured, time-limited, and goal-oriented (Beck, 2001). The theory expanded to address cognitive distortions and integrate behavioural strategies, like confronting fears. According to Beck, individuals interpret events through cognitive schemas, which can be adaptive or maladaptive (Beck, 2011). Maladaptive schemas distort thinking and often lead to emotional distress. Beck's framework highlights how thoughts, emotions, and behaviours interconnect in cycles of distress (Beck, 2014), processed through quick, automatic responses and slower, reflective systems.

Cognitive psychology studies mental processes like perception, memory, language, problem-solving, and decision-making, focusing on how people acquire, process, and store information. Emerging in the mid-20th century as a response to behaviourism's neglect of internal thought, it explores how thinking shapes emotions and behaviours. Aaron Beck, one of the fundamental figures, advanced this field through his cognitive theory and its uses in psychotherapy. Cognitive psychology has profoundly influenced research by providing frameworks to examine attention, learning, memory disorders, decision-making, and emotional regulation. It's also essential for understanding mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and personality disorders (Beck et al., 1962).

Aaron Beck defines depression as a disorder sustained by negative thoughts and cognitive distortions, centred on the cognitive triad: a negative view of self, world, and future. Depression is marked by persistent sadness, anhedonia, appetite or weight changes, sleep disturbances, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, psychomotor changes, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, and suicidal thoughts.

Cognitive distortions like overestimating failures deepen these symptoms. Trauma often underlies or worsens depression by fostering negative thinking and increasing vulnerability, especially when coping mechanisms are ineffective. Trauma can trigger emotional distress and depressive symptoms like hopelessness and emptiness; it can also lead to physiological changes from chronic stress, further impairing one's ability to manage new stressors (Beck & Clark, 1988; Clark et al., 1994). Thus, trauma and depression are closely linked, with trauma both shaping cognitive distortions and heightening the risk and severity of depressive disorders.

Anxiety arises from maladaptive thinking that exaggerates danger and vulnerability, with insecurity playing a key role. Insecure individuals often experience self-doubt, fear of rejection, negative self-perception, and a need for validation, which fuel anxiety (Beck & Clark, 1988; Clark et al., 1994). These traits manifest in symptoms like panic attacks, persistent worry, threat-focused thoughts, avoidance of feared situations, and psychological issues such as restlessness and sleep disturbances.

Insecurity deepens anxiety by fostering perfectionism and fear of judgment, leading to social anxiety and sensitivity to criticism. This creates a cycle where negative thoughts and avoidance behaviours reinforce feelings of inadequacy and fear, making individuals more vulnerable to chronic anxiety.

Decision-making is a structured process involving identifying options, weighing pros and cons, gathering information, clarifying goals, and evaluating outcomes. Trauma and insecurity heavily disrupt this process (Beck, 2011). Trauma heightens fear and anxiety, leading to avoidance or impulsive decisions to escape distress. Distorted thinking, like catastrophizing, and mistrust from betrayal experiences further complicate choices and limit opportunities. Insecurity impacts emotional responses, low self-esteem, and fear of mistakes, causing hesitation, dependence on others' approval, and rigid thinking, stifling exploration.

Coping mechanisms also shape decision-making. Problem-focused coping leads to rational choices by tackling stress directly, while emotion-focused coping manages feelings, often avoiding real issues. Adaptive coping, like seeking support, improves decisions, whereas maladaptive coping, like avoidance, worsens them. Ultimately, coping mechanisms and decisions influence each other. Decisions can strengthen or weaken coping abilities, affecting future resilience or vulnerability.

The data collection for this study will be drawn from the manga *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, focusing on the characters' traumatic experiences and traits of insecurity. Special attention will be given to their background stories to highlight how trauma and insecurity manifest in their decisions.

Data collection will involve close reading of the manga, examining both visual and narrative elements to uncover signs of trauma and insecurity that lead to cognitive disruptions in decision-making. This includes analysing images and dialogue bubbles from the translated online version of the manga. Relevant scenes will be captured as data, encompassing both visual and textual evidence. The manga will be re-read thoroughly to deepen understanding of the characters' background, traumatic experiences, insecurity, and the decisions influenced by these factors.

For data analysis, the study will apply Aaron Beck's cognitive psychology theory, using a psychoanalytic lens to explore how trauma and insecurity affect the characters' decision-making processes. Identification of trauma and insecurity traits will be guided by references from the Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II) and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), with findings systematically organised into tables.

There are 21 items in the BDI-II. However, this study will use only 9 of them to assess trauma. This is because not all items in the BDI-II specifically reflect trauma; some indicate severe mental states linked directly to depression. Since trauma does not always progress to depression, though depression often has roots in trauma, this study selects 9 items that best represent general traits of trauma. These items will serve as the tool to identify signs of trauma in the main character of *Kimetsu no Yaiba*.

The BAI consists of 21 items. However, this study will only be using 8 of them to assess insecurity. This focused selection aims to highlight items that best capture the traits of insecurity, given that the BAI is primarily designed to measure anxiety. Insecurity is closely linked to anxiety, as feelings of insecurity often trigger anxious responses. However, anxiety can also stem from many other sources, such as actual threats, health conditions, phobias, or general psychological hyperarousal, like panic attacks. By selecting these 8 items, the study concentrates on aspects of anxiety specifically tied to insecurity.

Tables will be used to list the items in the BDI-II and BAI. The listed items will be checked to see if they match the traits portrayed by the characters. The characters' decisions will then be reanalysed to explore the underlying hope guiding their decisions throughout the journey. This study seeks to uncover the connection between trauma, insecurity, and the decision-making process by conducting a literary analysis of *Kimetsu no Yaiba* using Beck's cognitive theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Building on previous studies that explored trauma, insecurity, and their psychological impact such as Hidayat and Indarujati's (2020) analysis trauma types and

symptoms, Umer and Aziz's (2022) exploration of recovery stages, and Marwati and Rudianto's (2022) examination of PTSD causes and coping mechanism, this section applies Aaron Beck's cognitive psychological paradigm to analyse how trauma and insecurity shape the cognitive processes and decision-making of the characters in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*.

Similar to the previous works, this study investigates patterns of cognitive distortions, adaptive or maladaptive schemas, and coping strategies rooted in past experiences. This study will also seek more by exploring how insecurity takes part in shaping cognition. Ultimately, the analysis demonstrates how psychological disruptions chart paths towards heroism or destruction.

Analysis of Giyuu Tomioka

Giyuu Tomioka is the Water Pillar in the series *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, mastering the Water Breathing technique. Giyuu is a part of the Demon Slayer Corps.

a. **Giyuu's Trauma**

Giyuu is a calm, reserved, and often distant character. Despite the power he has, he quietly bears the weight of past losses.

Figure 1: Giyuu's Final Trial (Vol 15, Chap 30, Pg 17)

Figure 1 shows scenes from Giyuu's past. Younger Giyuu is depicted during and after his final selection. Injured and pale, he clutches his bleeding eye, fear and pain evident in his teary expression. When Sabito steps forward to protect another participant, Giyuu reaches out to stop him, but fails. Later, he learns Sabito died in the trial, while he survived without killing a demon. This explains Giyuu's distant nature, insecurity, and doubts about his worth as a swordsman.

In Giyuu's flashback, it's shown that he and Sabito were close friends and training partners under Sakonji Urokodaki after both lost their families to demons. Unlike Sabito's optimistic drive to fight, Giyuu was deeply pessimistic and consumed by grief over his sister's death. His sister had sacrificed herself to save him, hiding Giyuu the night before her wedding so he could live. Overwhelmed by guilt and

sorrow, Giyuu wished to die and follow her, seeing no purpose in surviving. Sabito forcefully confronted him, slapping Giyuu and declaring, *"You have nobody else? That's an insult to your sister. You can't die. Ever."*

This moment highlighted Giyuu's vulnerability and his passive death wish, common in early depressive stages, driven by trauma and despair. Sabito's harsh reminder steered Giyuu away from succumbing to these feelings, urging him to honour his sister's sacrifice by continuing to live and fight. This underscores how Giyuu's deep grief shaped his fragile outlook on life and nearly pushed him toward passive suicide, only tempered by Sabito's intervention. Giyuu's reactions illustrate clear symptoms of trauma, including hopelessness, emotional numbness, and a profound struggle with self-worth.

Table 1: Giyuu's Trauma Checklist

BDI-II Checklist on Giyuu Tomioka	
Sadness	✔
Past Failure	✔
Feelings of Guilt	✔
Self-Dislike	✔
Loss of Pleasure	✔
Denial	✔
Concentration Difficulty	✔
Irritability	
Crying	✔

According to the checklist, Giyuu exhibits clear traits of trauma. His grief over losing his sister and Sabito is shown in his tearful expression and deep sadness after Sabito's death during the final selection. Giyuu's guilt and self-dislike stem from feeling helpless in both tragedies, believing he's too weak and always reliant on others. Giyuu's flashback reveals his sadness, tears, and fear after failing to kill a demon, reflecting BDI-II traits like sadness, crying, and past failures.

Giyuu also shows more signs of trauma, such as guilt, loss of pleasure, denial, and difficulty concentrating. Giyuu recalls, *"I didn't want to remember. My tears just wouldn't stop. Whenever I did remember, I got so sad I couldn't do anything,"* highlighting how memories of Sabito paralyse him with sorrow. This demonstrates how his trauma overwhelms daily functioning and deepens his emotional wounds.

b. **Giyuu's Insecurity**

Giyuu Tomioka's past failures and self-dislike from his trauma have fostered deep insecurity, leading to persistent self-doubt and a long, internal struggle to come to terms with his past.

GIYUU

"I was selected for surviving the seven days. But I am a human who couldn't beat a single demon, and I was bailed out. Can I really say I passed? I am not worthy of becoming The Water Pillar. I am not worthy of standing with the other pillars as equals. I'm not like them, I never should've had a place among the demon slayers."

(Volume 15, Chapter 130, Page 17-18)

In his dialogue with Tanjirou, Giyuu reveals the depth of his insecurity. During the final selection, he failed to kill a single low-ranking demon on Wisteria Mountain. Injured and trying to escape, he was saved by Sabito, who later died fighting demons. Despite Giyuu's failure, he was chosen as a demon slayer, while Sabito, who displayed true strength, lost his life and did not pass.

This outcome deeply wounded Giyuu's self-worth. He called himself an "incompatible human who couldn't beat a single demon" and has since underestimated himself. Even as the Water Pillar, he still believes he is unworthy of standing alongside the other Hashira, convinced Sabito would have deserved the position more. As he says, *"I never should've had a place among the demon slayers,"* believing his death would have been more justified than Sabito's.

This highlights how Giyuu's past failure and loss shaped his lasting insecurity and low self-esteem. Unable to let go of his perceived failures and haunted by survivor's guilt, he internalises the belief that he should have died in Sabito's place. This emotional burden explains his distant demeanour and reluctance to connect with others.

The final selection became a turning point that solidified his doubt and sense of unworthiness, all rooted in earlier grief over his sister's death. Together, these experiences reveal how trauma and insecurity deeply influence Giyuu's self-perception and decisions, burdening him with guilt and self-dislike despite his true strength.

Table 2: Giyuu's Insecurity Checklist

BAI Checklist on Giyuu Tomioka	
Nervous	✔
Unable to Relax	✔

Scared	✔
Fear of Losing Control	
Derealization	
Difficulty Breathing	
Worrying	✔
Feeling Embarrassed	✔

The checklist data above highlights the traits of insecurity that Giyuu exhibits through his facial expressions, gestures, and inner thoughts. His nervousness and inability to relax are evident in his flashback to the final selection at Wisteria Mountain. These traits stem from the intense fear and worry he experienced when cornered by a demon. His widened eyes, furrowed brow, sweat, tears, and clenched fist reveal the deep insecurity and panic he felt. Even as he reached out to Sabito, it was evident not only that he worried for his friend but also that he felt a sense of helplessness and fear.

After the final selection, Giyuu lived burdened by guilt and insecurity, knowing he was the only participant who failed to kill a demon yet was still chosen as a demon slayer. This haunted him as he trained relentlessly, eventually rising to the rank of Water Pillar. However, his self-doubt never faded. His dialogue, *"Can I really say I passed? I am not worthy of becoming The Water Pillar. I am not worthy of standing with the other pillars as equals,"* exposes his lingering low self-esteem. It reflects the shame tied to his past failure, surviving without earning it in his eyes, while Sabito, who fought bravely and killed several demons, died and failed to pass. This enduring insecurity shapes Giyuu's perspective of himself, revealing how his trauma and guilt deeply impact his confidence and sense of worth, despite his undeniable strength and achievements.

c. **Giyuu's Decisions**
Giyuu Tomioka bears the heavy weight of his past losses, which lead him to doubt his worth and view himself with deep self-contempt. These inner struggles shape the decisions he makes as he grapples with the pain of his trauma and insecurity.

Figure 2: Giyuu's Distant Attitude (Vol 15, Chap 129, Pg 7)

The evidence above illustrates Giyuu's distant and withdrawn behaviour as a coping mechanism shaped by his past trauma and insecurity. In Figure 2, after Amane requests the pillars to train other demon slayers for the upcoming battle, Giyuu, with a blank expression, abruptly stands and prepares to leave. His indifferent reaction provokes Sanemi's anger, who glares furiously at him. Giyuu coldly responds that the training is none of his concern, dismissing the discussion before walking toward the door.

As Giyuu continues without care, Sanemi's rage boils over, shouting at him with jagged dialogue bubbles to show his fury. Meanwhile, Shinobu calmly questions why Giyuu acts so indifferent. He pauses only to say he is "not like them," a vague statement that the others interpret as arrogance. These scenes show how Giyuu's chosen coping strategy, keeping his distance and suppressing his struggles, leads to misunderstandings and deepens the gap between him and his peers.

Giyuu's cold, distant behaviour reflects maladaptive coping shaped by deep-seated trauma and insecurity. He avoids social connections, withdraws emotionally, and harshly criticises himself, believing Sabito was more deserving to live. This guilt and insecurity about his worth as a swordsman leave him struggling with poor communication, often misunderstood by peers as arrogant. Giyuu also shows adaptive coping by training relentlessly, becoming the Water Pillar despite his doubts. His *haori*, sewn from his sister's and Sabito's garments, symbolises the weight of memories he carries daily.

As Kashdan, Elhai, & Frueh (2007) describe, Giyuu embodies PTSD traits, diminished interest in life, emotional detachment, and restricted expression. By adulthood, his eyes have dulled, reflecting a man moving through life hollowed by past pain. Giyuu's trauma from losing his sister nearly drove him to give up on life, but Sabito's words forced him forward.

However, insecurity traps him in the past, preventing true healing.

His emotional numbness and self-isolation portray more than psychological scars; they enrich his role as a guilt-ridden, brooding figure, mirroring literature's common motif of wounded characters burdened by remorse and unworthiness. Though his primary response to trauma is to distance himself, his unwavering dedication to protecting others reveals a quiet resilience.

Giyuu's internal struggle between guilt and duty highlights themes of sacrifice, perseverance, and the silent strength found in enduring emotional pain. His story underscores how unresolved trauma shapes decisions, blending adaptive and maladaptive paths that deepen both his character and the narrative's exploration of sorrow and silent endurance.

Analysis of Akaza

Akaza is one of Muzan's Twelve *Kizuki*. Ranking in the upper rank three, Akaza is a prominent antagonist of the series.

a. Akaza's Trauma

Akaza, the Upper Rank Three of the Twelve *Kizuki*, hold a strong influence in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*. Despite his power and ability, he holds deep psychological wounds from his past life as a human named Hakuji.

Figure 3: Akaza's Father's Death (Vol 18, Chap 154, Pg 9)

Hakuji's trauma over his father's death is powerfully shown in his flashback. After returning home, still wounded from punishment for stealing money, he finds his father has hanged himself, leaving only an apology for being a burden. Figure 3 depicts this painful past. Clutching the letter, Hakuji walks aimlessly to his father's grave, ignoring his injuries. Hakuji then collapses at the grave, hugging it tightly and sobbing.

This traumatic event left deep psychological scars. Unlike his physical pain, Hakuji couldn't endure losing his father, whom he had sacrificed so much to help. The grief and guilt from this loss haunted him, shaping his belief that the world is harsh and unfair. His repeated, desperate questioning of "why" reveals a tragic misunderstanding and emotional disconnect between them, caused by poverty and silent suffering. This moment exposes the roots of Hakuji's anger, sorrow, and vulnerability, highlighting how early trauma carved the path for his later pain and destructive choices.

Hakuji's life briefly found hope when Keizou, a martial arts master, took him in after witnessing his strength. At the *Soryuu dojo*, Keizou taught him that true power protects the weak. Hakuji helped run the *dojo* and cared for Keizou's ill daughter, Koyuki. Over the years, they grew close, and Keizou wished Hakuji to marry Koyuki and inherit the *dojo*. Just as Hakuji began to heal and embrace a future filled with family and purpose, tragedy struck. Rivals from the *Kenjutsu dojo* poisoned the well, killing both Keizou and Koyuki.

Figure 4: Akaza's Second Loss (Vol 18, Chap 155, Pg 10)

Figure 4 captures this devastation. A student informs Hakuji of the poisoning, his fists clenched in anguish. Hakuji stands frozen, eyes wide with shock. When he finds their bodies, he kneels beside Koyuki, holding her lifeless form, painfully reminded of his promise to take her to see the fireworks, now forever unfulfilled. This cruel loss crushed Hakuji's fragile happiness. After finally learning to love and live again, everything was ripped away, deepening his

trauma and fueling the sorrow and rage that would later consume him.

Table 3: Akaza's Trauma Checklist

BDI-II Checklist on Akaza	
Sadness	✔
Past Failure	✔
Feelings of Guilt	✔
Self-Dislike	✔
Loss of Pleasure	
Denial	
Concentration Difficulty	✔
Irritability	✔
Crying	✔

Looking at Table 3, Hakuji exhibits several BDI-II traits, indicating deep trauma from losing his father, then Keizou and Koyuki. His tears, pained expressions, and internal questions reveal profound sadness and guilt over failing to protect those he loved. He struggles to breathe and focus, tormented by why he must endure such cruelty. This fuels his rage toward the world's unfairness. Hakuji remains tense, burdened by helplessness and shame, yet also shows deep care, tending to loved ones when sick and reacting fiercely to threats against them, highlighting his constant worry and the lingering impact of his traumatic losses.

b. **Akaza's Insecurity**

Akaza's relentless pursuit of strength and power is deeply rooted in the insecurity born from his past as Hakuji. Having twice suffered the devastating loss of those he loved, he continues to chase strength without fully understanding its purpose.

Figure 5: Akaza's Promises (Vol 18, Chap 155, Pg 13)

After the grief of losing Keizou and Koyuki, Hakuji reflects on the memories and promises he once made to his wife. In Figure 5, Hakuji and Koyuki are shown standing together in an open field, enjoying the fireworks festival. They shared a joyful time, and Hakuji vowed to bring her back to see the fireworks the following year when her health improved. He also promised to become stronger than anyone else so he could protect her for the rest of their lives. In this tender moment from his flashback, they held hands, and Koyuki, moved by his promise, smiled warmly with tears in her eyes. They embraced their happiness and pledged to support each other.

Tragically, the very next day, Koyuki and Keizou were poisoned. Having lost his family yet again, Hakuji was consumed by shame for failing to protect them. His sense of humiliation, an indicator of deep-seated insecurity, emerges clearly in his monologue: *"In the end, it was nothing but words. I couldn't even manage a single thing."* This reveals how deeply he feels embarrassed by his inability to fulfil even one of his promises.

Table 4: Akaza's Insecurity Checklist

BAI Checklist on Akaza	
Nervous	
Unable to Relax	✔
Scared	
Fear of Losing Control	
Derealization	
Difficulty Breathing	✔
Worrying	✔
Feeling Embarrassed	✔

Table 4 presents the checklist of insecurity traits observed in Hakuji, Akaza's name when he was still human. Hakuji exhibits several signs of insecurity, including restlessness, trouble breathing, persistent worry, and feelings of shame. Although he does not display an extensive range of insecure traits, his actions and words still reveal that even someone outwardly strong can experience uncertainty in vulnerable situations.

As previously highlighted, Hakuji's deep embarrassment surfaces after losing his family once more. The memories and promises he shared with Koyuki weigh heavily on him, filling him with shame for failing to protect her or keep his promise to take her to see the fireworks again. He also shows tendencies to worry and an inability to relax.

Thus, Akaza reveals several signs of insecurity through his backstory as a human named Hakuji. His life, marked by repeated sorrow and loss, exposes his deep-seated insecurities. These feelings become most

evident following the devastating deaths of his loved ones.

After his father took his own life, Hakuji felt helpless and weak, burdened by the fact that he couldn't afford better treatment. Although he later found brief happiness with Keizou and Koyuki, this peace was shattered by another tragedy. When Keizou and Koyuki were poisoned, Hakuji's sense of worthlessness and despair grew even stronger. Despite his considerable strength, he failed to protect those he cherished. These painful experiences left him vulnerable, fueling insecurities that took root and continued to shape him.

c. **Akaza's Decisions**

Akaza is driven by an obsession with strength and a deep contempt for weakness, roots that trace back to the sorrow and pain of his human life as Hakuji. Ultimately, those became the catalyst that pushed him to abandon his humanity and begin anew as a demon.

Hakuji's deep grief led to cognitive distortions that triggered intense irritability and violent outbursts. Overwhelmed by thoughts of the world's cruelty, Hakuji loses control and attacks villagers. His eyes turn blank white with veins bulging across his face and arms, teeth clenched in fury. Brutally, he grabs a man by the hair and drives his knee into his face, continuing to beat others even as his knuckles bruise.

When he finally regains awareness, sweat drips down his calmer face as he pants, surrounded by groaning victims. This shift in expression shows how his inability to relax or focus spirals into rage. The scene closes with Keizou witnessing Hakuji's violent strength, impressed by how a mere boy could defeat several grown men, highlighting the dangerous mix of trauma, anger, and raw power driving Hakuji's actions.

Hakuji's trauma deepens after Keizou and Koyuki's deaths, pushing his rage beyond control. Fueled by overwhelming grief, he tears off a man's head and punches through another's stomach. His rampage at the Kenjutsu dojo ends with sixty-seven people brutally slaughtered, bodies mangled, missing limbs and organs, blood splattered across walls, floors, and ceilings.

This horrific aftermath, recorded in an investigation note, reveals how Hakuji's unresolved grief and cognitive distortions escalate into catastrophic violence. His severe emotional dysregulation shows a collapse of coping mechanisms, turning sorrow into murderous fury.

Each traumatic loss strips away his mental stability, leaving him consumed by rage, unable to process pain in any way but through devastating force.

AKAZA

"I became a demon and lost my memories. I wanted strength once again. Even though there wasn't a single thing left I wanted to protect. I really didn't want to live in a world where I lost my family. But for over a hundred years, I kept pointlessly murdering over and over again. Yet at the end of the day, it's just a pathetic, comical, uninteresting story."

(Volume 18, Chapter 155, Page 19)

After his second violent outburst, Hakuji wanders at midnight, still drenched in blood and rage, until he crosses paths with Muzan. Impressed by his brutal strength, Muzan offers him a new life as a demon. Accepting this, Hakuji's life transforms completely, and he becomes Akaza, Upper Rank Three of the Twelve *Kizuki*. Unlike other Twelve *Kizuki*, Akaza retains no memory of his human past. This suggests either Muzan erased them instantly, or more likely, Hakuji's mind subconsciously abandoned them to escape his overwhelming trauma, a condition known as dissociative amnesia (APA, 2022).

Akaza's final monologue in Chapter 155 reveals that while his mind forgot, his body still remembers the instinct to protect, driving his relentless pursuit of strength. Stripped of purpose, his obsession becomes hollow, masking deep vulnerability he can no longer consciously grasp. This coping mechanism, erasing memories, clinging to power, and channelling pain into violence, illustrates a maladaptive response to grief and guilt.

Akaza's story reflects a classic literary theme: trauma distorting identity. His forgotten humanity and compulsive aggression highlight the tragedy of a soul fleeing pain by abandoning its very core. Despite the loss of memory, traces of sorrow occasionally resurface, hinting at the buried wounds that still shape him. Thus, Akaza's descent into evil embodies how unresolved trauma and guilt can dictate a fate steeped in violence and loss.

CONCLUSION

Through a close literary and psychological reading of *Kimetsu no Yaiba*, this study reveals how trauma and insecurity profoundly shape the characters' cognition, emotions, and decisions, using Beck's cognitive framework to dissect their internal struggles.

Giyuu Tomioka exemplifies a character whose unresolved grief over his sister's and Sabito's deaths

manifests as deep insecurity and low self-esteem. This trauma leads to cognitive distortions such as self-criticism, guilt, and a diminished sense of self-worth, despite his clear external accomplishments. His coping mechanisms are a mix of maladaptive strategies, social withdrawal, emotional numbing, avoidance, and adaptive ones, such as persistent training and fulfilling his duties as the Water Pillar.

His uniquely symbolic *haori*, stitched together from his sister's and Sabito's garments, visually embodies the emotional burdens he carries. These complexities align with literary motifs of the tragic hero burdened by past losses, illustrating how unresolved sorrow subtly distorts his identity and social interactions.

Similarly, Akaza, once Hakuji, demonstrates how compounded grief and feelings of helplessness evolve into violent cognitive disruptions. The devastating losses of his father, followed by Keizou and Koyuki, erode his emotional stability, triggering rage explosions and a spiral into profound psychological decompensation.

Hakuji's transformation into Akaza is driven by dissociative amnesia, either imposed by Muzan or as a subconscious escape from unbearable trauma, paired with an obsessive pursuit of strength. This desperate fixation masks a fragile core terrified of further loss, turning his coping into aggression and avoidance. Akaza's erased memories and compulsive violence echo classic literary explorations of characters who bury their humanity to flee pain, becoming tragic antagonists shaped by hidden wounds.

Collectively, these analyses show how trauma and insecurity alter cognitive processes, fostering maladaptive schemas, distorted thinking, and flawed problem-solving, consistent with Beck's theory. The characters' decisions, Giyuu's quiet withdrawal despite his duty, and Akaza's violent quest for power, stem directly from these psychological disruptions. Such portrayals not only deepen the narrative complexity of *Kimetsu no Yaiba* but also highlight universal literary themes of guilt, loss, and the fragile human psyche's attempt to navigate overwhelming grief.

Ultimately, this study underscores how *Kimetsu no Yaiba* masterfully intertwines emotional realism with literary tragedy. By exposing how unhealed trauma shapes cognition and behaviour, the story mirrors real psychological phenomena, offering poignant reflections on resilience, the haunting nature of memory, and the tragic paths that unresolved pain can carve into the human soul.

Alongside the conclusion, it is hoped these suggestions guide researchers interested in exploring similar topics or applying Aaron Beck's cognitive psychology within literary studies. Given that this analysis highlights how cognitive processes trauma and insecurity, future studies are encouraged to use cognitive psychology to examine how the brain receives, processes, and stores information that influences decisions.

Researchers might also explore other characters with severe mental illnesses, seemingly cliché traumas that significantly impact decisions, or compare protagonists and antagonists with similar cognitive distortions and shared belief systems. Additionally, those wishing to continue research on *Kimetsu no Yaiba* could approach it through diverse perspectives, such as linguistics, symbolism, feminism, or binary opposition. By broadening the focus to different psychological patterns or theoretical frameworks, future analyses can deepen understanding of how literature portrays complex mental processes and internal conflicts. This study is thus expected to serve as a valuable reference and inspiration for such explorations.

SUGGESTIONS

It is anticipated that this analysis's recommendations will act as a guide for future researchers who wish to examine a related subject or use Aaron Beck's Cognitive Psychology in the field of literature. Based on the analysis's results, it is advised to analyse the idea of how the brain functions using cognitive psychology theory. This method provides a viewpoint that shows how information is taken in, processed, and stored in the brain so that it can be taken into account when making decisions.

Furthermore, it is recommended that future researchers who wish to analyse cognitive processes in the field of literature elaborate on potentially distinct objects of analysis, such as characters with severe mental illness, characters with seemingly cliched trauma that significantly affects decision-making, protagonists and antagonists with similar cognitive distortions, and characters with shared ideologies or belief systems. Furthermore, it is recommended that future scholars who wish to employ *Kimetsu no Yaiba* in their analysis expand on potential topics of study from other angles, including linguistics, symbolism, feminism, and binary opposition. It is intended that this analysis will be a crucial resource for upcoming studies.

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