



Psychological Trauma Faced by Children in Foster Care in *Twelve patients: Life and Death at Bellevue hospital* by Eric Manheimer

Shankamithraa P C

Department of English

PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore.

Dr. M. John Suganya

Associate Professor of English

PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore.

Abstract

This article focuses on the psychological trauma suffered by children in foster care in chapter two “Tanisha” of Eric Manheimer’s *Twelve Patients: Life and Death at Bellevue Hospital*. This psychological trauma may be due to lack of love and affection, physical, emotional or sexual abuse. The children as a result suffer from various psychological disabilities like depression, self-isolation, inability to form healthy future relationships and suicidal thoughts. Dr. Eric Manheimer focuses on the life of sixteen-year-old girl Tanisha who is the victim of the foster system. The researcher studies the character of Tanisha where she is physically abused and violated in the foster care and due to how there is no stability in her life as a result of constant jumping from one foster home to another. The aim of this article is to portray how the absence of a primary care giver in the life of a child affects her ability to form future relationships by applying attachment theory.

Key words: psychological trauma, depression, psychological disorder, suicidal thoughts, attachment theory.

Introduction

In America the foster system plays a major role in raising children under 18 years of age who have been abandoned or abused or unable to be raised by their biological parents. Foster parents are adults who temporarily step in to raise these kids in need. The foster system works under governmental rules. The placement of a child in a foster home is usually decided by the child services who work under the government.

Twelve Patients: Life and Death at Bellevue Hospital is a non-fiction book written by Eric Manheimer, the former medical director of Bellevue Hospital in New York City. The book follows Manheimer's experiences and the stories of twelve different patients he encountered during his time at the hospital. Bellevue Hospital is one of the oldest public hospitals in the United States, known for its history of providing healthcare to underserved populations. The book takes readers into the heart of this renowned institution, shedding light on the challenges faced by both patients and medical staff

Chapter two "Tanisha," of the book shows the intricacies of the foster system in the life of a sixteen-year-old girl. The book was released on July 10, 2012. From 1997 through 2012, Dr. Eric Manheimer served as the medical director of Bellevue Hospital. Later he became a clinical professor at the School of Medicine at New York University. Dr. Eric Manheimer wrote this book as a dedication to the patients and the hard-working medical professionals, nurses, and social workers he worked with at Bellevue Hospital Centre for 15 years. This book served as an inspiration for the NBC medical drama *New Amsterdam*.

Glimpse of chapter two "Tanisha"

Tanisha, a sixteen-year-old girl, escaped from what was to be her twelfth placement in foster care at the crack of dawn on a bitterly cold morning. She escaped because she was raped by the boyfriend of her foster sister. Knowing that she would be transferred to the Bellevue hospital, she walks for almost four hours to arrive at the ACS building. Tanisha had no idea who her birth mother was other than the fact that she was a Latina drug user. She was abandoned by her mother at the age of six months and raised by some drug users. Later, child protective services intervened to save her and placed her in a foster home.

Tanisha was entrusted to the Smiths, a black Jamaican couple who already had six children in their care, when she was four years old. The spouse was an extremely abusive and violent person. Due to his frequent ranting at his wife, the youngsters in the house had trouble falling asleep at night. One day, ACS staff members saved all six of the kids and sent them to other shelters. Tanisha had lived in seven different homes by the time she was seven. She also experienced her first of many recurrent mental crises at the age of seven. She was sent to the Browns for care after receiving treatment. At first, everything seemed fine until Mr. Brown assaulted her sexually. Tanisha lacked a stable home because she had moved around between dilapidated houses.

Tanisha was always transferred to the mental unit at Bellevue Hospital whenever she was mentally ill or terrified for her life. Tanisha claimed that this hospital had therefore become her safest space possible. This time, Tanisha's psychiatrist Francesca allowed Dr. Manheimer to observe one of their intake interviews. This is where Dr. Manheimer observes that as a young kid, the only place she ever felt safe and considered home was with her "abuelita" or "mama Lola," as the six girls in her care called her. Mama Lola, a woman from the Dominican Republic, had a large family and several grandchildren, but she also adopted many foster children and raised them with compassion until she passed away. After her death the children under her ward were put

in different foster homes. To inform her of Tanisha's condition and convince her to take care of Tanisha, Dr. Manheimer gets in touch with Lola's eldest daughter. Additionally, he offers all of the paintings Tanisha created that depict her mother Lola's teenage aspirations in the DR. After carefully deliberating and making a decision with their family, Lila, the oldest daughter, and her husband chose to adopt Tanisha in order to fulfil their mother's dream. Tanisha has a hopeful future ahead of her as the chapter comes to a close.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is a psychological framework that helps us understand how early relationships with caregivers can influence a person's emotional and social development. It was developed by British psychologist John Bowlby in the mid-20th century. Bowlby's work emphasized the significance of early attachment experiences in shaping an individual's emotional and social development. Attachment theory has since become a fundamental concept in the fields of psychology and child development, influencing research on human relationships and mental health. When it comes to a teen in foster care, attachment theory remains relevant in several ways. Any trauma or disruptions in the early relationships with the caregivers affects the emotional and relational patterns of the child. Concerning this, author Suganya et al. says in her article "Communal Expectancy and the Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by Meredith Russo" that "Social exclusion will remain as a bruise forever" in an individual's life (Suganya et al. 882). Tanisha suffers from various psychological illnesses due to trauma she has faced. According to attachment theory, it also becomes very difficult for the children in broken foster homes to believe people. It could be evident in Tanisha not opening up to Dr. Manheimer, when he tells her that he could help her. The children also tend to form insecure attachments with people due to instability. Food can also heal these insecure attachments. For example, Suganya et al says in her article "Gender Performance on the Reinvigoration via Food" that "The characters in the novel use food to soothe self and others" (Suganya et al. 890). Teens in foster care often face multiple transitions and loss, including changes in caregivers and placements. These experiences can trigger attachment-related issues, like fear of abandonment. This could be noted in Tanisha's anxiety episodes.

Psychological trauma

Foster teen girls may experience a range of psychological traumas due to their unique life circumstances. These traumas can have profound and long-lasting effects on their emotional and mental well-being. Some common sources of psychological trauma for foster teen girls include:

1. Separation from Biological Family: The removal from their biological family due to abuse, neglect, or other reasons can be a traumatic experience. Foster teens may grapple with feelings of loss, abandonment, and grief. In the protagonist Tanisha's life, the thought of abandonment by her birth mother has put her in a state of loss of identity and abandonment. She feels unworthy of love and has very low expectations in her life.

2. **Multiple Placements:** Foster teens often move from one foster home to another, which can disrupt their sense of stability and attachment. This frequent change in living situations can lead to anxiety and difficulty forming trusting relationships. As described by the author, it is noted that Tanisha had been put into 12 different foster homes in her sixteen years of life. This constant change has led to instability in her life.

3. **Abuse or Neglect:** In some cases, foster teens may have experienced abuse or neglect in their biological families, and this trauma can continue to affect them even after placement in a foster home. Tanisha was raped by the boyfriend of her foster sister which forced her to come to thoughts of killing him first and killing herself just after that. It could be evident in the author's description in the book when he states, "He slid the window down, looked over at her, and took out a switchblade. This wasn't the first time that Tanisha had been raped, violated, or abused in foster care, but she decided it would be the last time" (Manheimer 27). Tanisha was also molested by her foster dad when she was placed under the care of the Brown family. All these physical abuses have caused Tanisha suffer from a lot of psychological traumas like anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and depression

4. **Loss of Identity:** Foster teens may struggle with their identity and sense of belonging, especially if they are placed in homes that don't share their cultural or ethnic background. This loss of identity can lead to feelings of isolation and confusion. Tanisha is a Dominican Haitian teenager. When she was put into several homes that weren't of her ethnic background, she felt lost and confused as described by the author Eric Manheimer in chapter two, "The Smiths were the first family that Tanisha remembered. They were a black Jamaican couple" (Manheimer 30).

Conclusion

Tanisha, the main character, suffered psychological trauma, and the book explores the impact that a dysfunctional foster system has on a foster child's life. The instability in Tanisha's life after her drug addict mother abandoned her leads to depression. Tanisha suffers from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and thoughts of suicide due to the sexual and mental abuse that she has experienced in various broken foster homes. Application of attachment theory shows that children from broken foster homes isolate themselves from people due to trust issues, which is evident in Tanisha's case. Tanisha's future is secured by Dr. Manheimer's efforts in persuading Lila, the daughter of mama Lola who was the only person that Tanisha considered as a primary caregiver. Tanisha's future is secured by Dr. Manheimer's efforts in persuading Lila, the daughter of mama Lola who was the only person that Tanisha considered as a primary caregiver. The conclusion of the research is that the primary caregiver of the abandoned children should understand the emotional and mental state of the children and provide the needful with sensitivity.

References

Manheimer, Eric. *Twelve Patients: Life and Death at Bellevue Hospital*. Grand Central Publishing 2012, New York.

Suganya, M.John & Boopalan, Priyanga & .V, Harish Sachin. (2023). Gender Performance on the Reinvigoration via Food Section A-Research paper Eur. European Chemical Bulletin. 12. 883-891. 10.31838/ecb/2023.12.s1.095.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140450_Gender_Performance_on_the_Reinvigoration_via_Food_Section_A-Research_paper_Eur.

<https://www.eurchembull.com/uploads/paper/b9181a968de998b7727c25b6af5d20f2.pdf>.

Suganya, M.John & S., Jeevitha & Grashya, L.. (2023). Communal Expectancy and the Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by Meredith Russo. European Chemical Bulletin. 12. 878-882. 10.31838/ecb/2023.12.s1.094. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140477_Communal_Expectancy_and_the_Authentic_Self_of_Men_and_Transgenders_-_Arms_and_the_Man_by_George_Bernard_Shaw_and_Birthday_by_Meredith_Russo.

[https://www.eurchembull.com/uploads/paper/72c7b104b7b5ddc1f8fe0b8cbb0f69a8.p](https://www.eurchembull.com/uploads/paper/72c7b104b7b5ddc1f8fe0b8cbb0f69a8.pdf)

df

“Twelve Patients: A Tribute to HHC” 2012,

<https://www.nyc.gov/html/hhc/html/newsletter/201208-eric-manheimer.shtml#:~:text=Twelve%20Patients%3A%20A%20Tribute%20to%20HHChttps://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9657-antisocial-personality-disorder>.

“Twelve Patients: Life and death at Bellevue Hospital” publishers weekly 2012, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/9781455503889>.