

**LIBBY'S DEPRESSION AS SEEN IN JENNIFER NIVEN'S *HOLDING UP******THE UNIVERSE*****Putut Handoko**

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**Abstract**

The thesis writer focuses on the analysis of Libby's Depression as seen in Jennifer Niven's *Holding Up The Universe*. The objectives of the study are, to find out the types of Libby's Depression, the causal factors of Libby's Depression and the effects of Libby's Depression as seen in Jennifer Niven's *Holding Up The Universe* on herself, the society, and Jack Masselin. The thesis writer applies the theory of concept of depression, sign and symptoms of depression, the causes of depression, and she also applies a qualitative research.

Keywords: Depression

## **Background of The Study**

The human being experiences anxiety, feelings of lack of enthusiasm and protracted stress. However, people still think that depression is an easy thing and it can disappear by itself. The existence of a state of depression cannot be predicted and it can occur when a child feels sad because of the loss of one of his parents so that he has emotional disturbances that can eliminate the figure of him being a psychologically normal person in adolescence. Philip G. Zimbardo (1980 : 409) states that :

Depression is emotional state of dejection, feelings of worthlessness, and sense of apprehension; it is the most prevalent psychiatric disorder in the United States and bears a marked similarity to the symptoms of learned helplessness.

Basically, the human being can feel the anxiety that occurs in people's lives. Anxiety occurs outside the will when in any situation or in a situation of feeling of unhappiness as states by Hurlock, (1998) anxiety is part of everyday life and almost every individual has experienced, only the levels are different. The above quote explains that in every life can experience different anxiety that disrupts the psychology of personality that exists in humans.

Literature has two forms, Fiction and Non-fiction. Forms of fiction are novels, dramas, poetry while non-fiction is treatises, biographies, and journalism. The work of fiction is a literary work created or formed and based on the imagination of the author as explained by Altenbernd and Lewis (1996: 14) which means that Fiction as an imaginative alternative prose, but usually makes sense and contains truth that dramatizes human relations.

**Statement of the Problem**, there are three statements of problem for this study: What are the types of Libby's depression as seen in Jennifer Niven's Holding up the Universe?; What are the causes of Libby's depression as seen in Jennifer Niven's Holding up the Universe?; What are the effects of Libby's depression on herself, the society and Jack Masselin?

**Objective of the Study**, there are three objectives of Study: to find out the types of Libby's depression as seen in Jennifer Niven's Holding up the Universe; to find out the causes of Libby's depression as seen in Jennifer Niven's Holding up the Universe; to find out the effects of Libby's depression on herself, the society and Jack Masselin.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **Types of Depression**

Depression from the Journal has several types there are four of categories of depression:

### **Major depression**

It is included in severe depression characterized by a combination of symptoms that lasts for at least two weeks, including sadness or irritability mood, which interferes with activities like to work, sleep, eat, and at the same time enjoy fun activities. Deactivating depression episodes can occur once, twice, or several times in a lifetime. They might have this type if they feel depressed most of the time for most days of the week. Some other symptoms they might have are:

- a. Loss of interest or pleasure in your activities
- b. Weight loss or gain
- c. Trouble getting to sleep or feeling sleepy during the day
- d. Feelings restless and agitated, or else very sluggish and slowed down physically or mentally
- e. Being tired and without energy
- f. Feeling worthless or guilty
- g. Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- h. Thoughts of suicide

### **Dysthymia**

Dysthymia is a type of depression that is not too severe which has a longer time than the major depression. It involves

long-term (chronic) symptoms that do not deactivate but have not prevented feeling good. Usually, people with dysthymia also experience depression, until a combination of these two types of depression is called dual depression. If they have a depression that lasts for 2 years or more, it is called persistent depression. They may have symptoms such as:

- a. Change in appetite (not eating enough or overeating)
- b. Sleep too much or too little
- c. Lack of energy, or fatigue
- d. Low self-esteem
- e. Irritability or anger
- f. Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- g. Feel hopeless

### **Bipolar disorder (manic depression)**

Bipolar disorder often occurs chronic and recurrent. Sometimes, mood can be dramatic and fast, but most often they are gradual. When in the cycle of depression, the person can experience one or all of them depressive symptoms. When on a manic cycle, one or all of the symptoms that are under the mania are possible experience. Mania often influences thinking, assessment, and social behavior in a way that causes serious and shameful problems.

### **Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)**

SAD is a mood disorder that has a seasonal pattern, also known as seasonal affective disorder or "winter blues", which is depression or bipolar disorder that occurs and ends around the same time in one year. Usually occurs in autumn and winter with remissions in spring or summer, but it can also occur at other times of the year. The cause of this disorder is unclear, but it is thought to be due to variations in exposure to light in different seasons to marked mood disorders (either periods of depression or mania).

### **Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)**

Women with PMDD have depression and other symptoms at the start of their period. Besides feeling depressed, may also have:

- a. Mood swings
- b. Irritability
- c. Anxiety
- d. Trouble concentrating
- e. Fatigue
- f. Change in appetite or sleep habits
- g. Feelings of being overwhelmed

### **'Situational' Depression**

These situational depression can have a depressed mood when they have difficulty managing stressful events in their lives, such as death in their family, divorce, or job loss. The doctor might call this "stress response syndrome.

### **Atypical Depression**

Atypical type is different from persistent sadness from typical depression. It is considered a "determinant" that describes the pattern of symptoms of depression. If you have atypical depression, a positive event can improve your mood for a while. Other symptoms of atypical depression include:

- a. Appetite increases
- b. Sleep more than usual
- c. Heavy feeling in your arms and legs
- d. Sensitive to criticism

### **The Causes of Depression**

#### **Influence of family**

The relationship between parents as well as their relationship with children can lead to conflict, divorce, alcoholism in the family, including mental health disorders and sexual domestic violence or moral character. According to an article published in the Journal of American Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Academy in 2004, states that family history becomes vulnerable to depression and the level of education of parents has an impact on the occurrence of symptoms of depression among adolescents.

#### **Social Factors and Lifestyle**

Often social or lifestyle factors can trigger depression seen in the form of family problems, traumatic

experiences, all types of stress, addiction, overwhelming every day of duty, insomnia, etc. This is not only a negative experience that causes depression but how people deal with it.

### **The School Environment**

Depression can also be caused by an increase in the level of stress associated with school, education, competition between students, which is set too high. A number of studies in 2005 (Norway), students aged 12-15 years were studied to establish a correlation between the influence of the school environment and depression disorders. The result is that stress occurs in school, welfare in class, relationship with teacher, school grades and symptoms of depression, especially among women.

### **Other Factors**

Some factors can develop depression such as changing schools, living quarters and a sense of despair and meaningless life. However, they are also for other problems related to sexuality, somatic disorders, and trauma. Depressive symptoms has shown that symptoms of depression are higher rate in affect young people get involved in bullying. As for depressive disorders also like, mental and emotional instability associated with attempts to escape reality, difficulties, produce stress, lose energy, appetite, etc

### **Genetics**

Scientific research proves that depression and maternal anxiety during pregnancy can be inherited and cause interference with newborns. According to some studies, depression can be associated with genes that remain on the chromosome. Using these results, it can be concluded that stress remains one of the main factors causing depression.

### **The Effect of Depression**

There are effects of Depression on symptoms in children and adolescents.

Firstly, the *Journal Debjit Bhowmik, et al* (Vol. 1 No. 3 2012) describes the

effects of depression, as follows:

Depressive symptoms can be different in children and adolescents. When young children experience difficulties, get angry quickly, despair, and worry. While the symptoms experienced by adolescents can include anxiety, anger, and avoidance of social interactions. Then depression in children and adolescents often occurs together with behavioral problems and mental safety conditions such as anxiety or lack of attention.

From the statement above, it can be understood that in young children and

adolescents will influence symptoms of depression when they will experience

things that make it difficult for them as well as the anxiety experienced in their

lives. Usually at the age of adolescents when experiencing depression, it will be

difficult for someone to interact with society.

Secondly, there are effects of depression symptoms in older adults. The

*Journal Debjit Bhowmik, et al* (Vol. 1 No. 3 2012) explains the effects of

depression, as follows:

Explain the effects of Depression in adults is not a normal part of getting older, but depression can indeed occur at an older age. In adults depression can disappear due to symptoms of lack of appetite, sleep

problems, the rest can be all from other diseases. Other than that, they can feel dissatisfied with social life, hungry, or always want to stay at home, not socialize, this indicates serious symptoms of depression, especially in men.

From that statement, the thesis writer means that depression can occur in adults which cannot be considered easy. However depression experienced in adults includes serious depression. Until it occurs in symptoms where they just want to be alone and not socialize. Especially in adult men when feeling depressed, he has the highest risk of suicide.

By highlighting the two statements above, the effects of Depression can be clarified as follows: (1) Symptoms of depression experienced in children and adolescents will arise when they feel difficult and feel anxious; (2) Adult symptoms can affect social life and want to be alone.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The thesis writer applies qualitative research in analyzing the topic. The source of data is taken from a novel entitled *Holding up the Universe* written by Jennifer Niven. The book contains 332 pages in e-book and it is published in April 2016.

## ANALYSIS

### The Types of Libby's Depression

Libby Strout, the main character of the story, an overweight girl who had trauma in her childhood secretly has a depression.

### 1. Major Depression

Libby experiences two symptoms of major depression, there are Trouble getting to sleep or feeling restless and agitated, or else very sluggish and slowed down physically or mentally which explain in the following :

#### A. Trouble getting to sleep or feeling sleepy during the day

Libby secretly had trouble getting to sleep as seen in one of the symptoms of depression in the type of major where she is lying in bed and trying to close her eyes as evidenced in the following quotation :

I lie on my bed, staring up into the dark, and my mind bounces across the room.

*What if you get trapped again? What if they have to knock down the cafeteria door or the bathroom wall to get you out? What if your dad gets married and then he dies and you're left with the new wife and stepsiblings? What if you die? What if there is no heaven and you never see your mom again?*

I tell myself to sleep, I close my eyes and lie every still. "I make my mind lie there with me and tell it, *sleep, sleep, sleep.*"

I open my eyes. (Niven, 2016 : 17)

The quotation means that she cannot sleep easily. She experiences many thoughts by lying in bed which only start at the darkness. Her mind bounces across the room. Libby's initial worry as if she is afraid of being trap again, and

force herself to take out of the bathroom wall, abandon by her father, also afraid of dying and unable to meet her mother in heaven.

## **B. Feelings restless and agitated, or else very sluggish and slowed down physically or mentally**

The second type that shows symptoms of this type of depression is feeling restless when Libby will take the school test and after she enters the school for the first time in related with the society, as seen in the following quote:

I tell myself, *Maybe this year you can try out for the Damsels.* 10

My brain goes zooming up the wall, where it hangs, shaking. "What if it never happens?" What if you die before anything good or wonderful or amazing ever happens to you? For the past two and a half years, the only thing I've had to worry about has been my survival. The focus of every single person in my life, including me, has been :*We just need to get you better.* And now I'm better. *So what if I let them down after all the time and energy they've invested in me?*(Niven, 2016 : 22 ) ,and I wait for my father to offer message words of advice or a stirring pep talk, but the most he comes up with is "You got this, Libby. I'll be here to pick you up when it's over.

Then he gives me a smile, which is the kind of smile they would teach you in a parenting video. It's nervous smile taped up at the corners. I smile back. "*What if I get stuck behind a desk? What if I have to eat lunch alone and no one talks to me for the rest of the school year?*" (Niven, 2016 : 26)

The quotation means that Libby feels restless about what she wants to be realized or not. This year Libby will take the Damsels entrance test. But, Libby has restless in her mind. She is afraid of going into schools Damsels. She is worry

about has been her survival.

Furthermore, Libby will enter her first school. After that when she enters Her first school in Damsels, she becomes restless when facing her new environment that she has never felt.

## **Dysthymia**

### **A. Feel hopeless**

The first symptom Libby experienced in dysthymia is a feeling hopeless.

Libby is desperate when she want to become a member of the Martin Van Buren

Middle School Damsels. But she feels pessimistic about her who would not be able to compare with her friends at school, as quoted as supporting this idea :

I make my mind lie there with me and tell it, *sleep, sleep, sleep.*"*What if you get to school and realize that things are different and kids are different, and no matter how much you try, you will never be able to catch up to them?*" I open my eyes.

My name is Libby Strout. You've probably heard of me, you've probably watched the video of me being rescued from my own house. At last count, 6,345,981 people have watched it, so there's a good chance you're one of them. Three years ago, I was America's Fattest Teen. I weighed 653 pounds at my heaviest, which means I was approximately 500 pounds overweight. (Niven, 2016 : 17-18 )

Based on the quotation above, Libby realizes that things are different and

she is different and she will not be able to catch up to them. Libby is pessimistic to go into Damsels school. Libby imagines how things are going on, the students at school will see what she is like. When she is known to the society, she realizes from her house, everyone sees and knows about the situation that has happened to Libby until she calls herself an America's Fattest Teen. This makes Libby difficult to accept the situation in the outside world.

### **The Causes of Libby's Depression**

There are two causes of Libby's Depression based on the explanation in theoretical background of this study, there are influence of family and other factors.

### **1. Influence of family**

The first cause of Libby's depression is the influence of family, which is a fairly traumatic experience losing her mother's figure which make Libby ignored by her father and her body developed as seen in the following quote: At first, I refused to talk to reporters, but at some point I needed to show the world that I'm okay and that my dad isn't the villain they made him out to be, .... My whole word changed when I was ten. "My mom died, which was traumatic enough, but then the bullying started." It didn't help that I developed early and that all at once my body felt too big for me. (Niven, 2016 :26-27)

It implies that the death of her mother when she was a child caused trauma, or in the words of depression and began bullying. The cause of the influence of family is that her father is seen by the world as being unable to look after Libby until she is depressed and allows Libby's body to develop. The event began to change when she was ten years old and when all felt lost to her mother and father's wife. But Libby does not blame her father and assumed that of all the events. The family influence that happened to Libby is her mother who left Libby that make her sad for a long time, and her father who let Libby at that time until Libby's body developed.

### **2. Other Factors**

The causes of Libby's depression is being involves in bullying that make her feels disturbed and make it difficult for her daily life because people see her so big and disgusting. During the incident, Libby received hate letters from people she does not know as quoted that supports the idea:

The way I see it, I've lost my mom, eaten myself nearly to death, been cut out of my house while the whole country watched, endured exercise regimes and diets and the nation's disappointment, and I've received hate mail from total strangers.

"It is disgusting that anyone would ever let themselves get so large, and it is disgusting that your father wouldn't do anything about it." (Niven, 2016 : 33)

The quotation above implies that Libby has been depressed because she get bullying at her life. Because of deep sadness losing her mother until she does not realize, she is eating until almost death. Even Libby tries all her efforts to lose weight but she still get the bullying by people who does not know her, even they send letters with hateful words. In this case, Libby finds it difficult to live her daily life. Many people often send letters of hatred with Libby's body condition.

### **The Effects of Libby's Depression**

#### **1. On Herself**

The indicator is experiencing anger in women in certain situations. Furthermore, experiencing anger that affect a woman's life in certain situations implies that the depression has affected Libby's personality in her life. So, the strong effect of that is where she receive a lot of comments on social with intimidation that is very painful. The quotation supports the ideas :



There are seventy-six comments, and only a few of them are nice. The rest say the usual : *if I was that big, I'd want to kill myself*. And :*She's pretty for a fat girl*. And :*Just looking at her makes me want to never eat again*. And simply :*LOSE WEIGHT, YOU FAT WHORE* This is exactly why I don't do social media. So many mean comments and snarky comments and bullying disguised I have this overwhelming urge to throw Bailey's phone away and my phone away, and then go up and down the street collecting phones so I can throw them away too. (Niven, 2016 : 98)

The above quote implies that there are many discussing comments about Libby's physicality. Some say that Libby is beautiful for a fat girl, can make other people not appetite when she sees her, there are always negative comments that trigger Libby's anger, because there are so many cruel and spicy comments on social media that Libby can't hold back her emotions then want to let go of her frustration by throwing away her cellphone and all existing cellphones even having to go down the road and take all the cellphones so they can be thrown away. Of the many negative comments Libby experienced the effect of anger.

## 2. The Society

The effect of Libby's depression on the society is experiencing difficulties in her life, which they can only bully and still see Libby's great condition as well as her past as seen in the following quote :

“Here's the worst thing of it,” I say. “You know how far I've come and I know how far I've come, but everyone else just sees me for how large I am or where I was years ago, not who I am now” (Niven, 2016 : 67)

The quote implies that Libby feels difficulties in living her life. Libby has make progress which means she has taken care to lose weight which used to be so fat that she can lose a few pounds. But the views of the society are different from what Libby seems to have ignored. The

society only looks at the physical condition and current situation or in Libby's condition years ago. The society can make it look worse and feel unwilling to know about the efforts Libby do to give effect to Libby which make it difficult for her life.

## CONCLUSION

Libby has two types of depression there are major depression and dysthymia. The first type of Major Depression, first is Trouble getting to sleep or feeling sleepy during the day. Libby trouble getting to sleep when she worry about herself if she is trap again, left by her father and cannot meet in heaven. The second is feelings restless and agitated, or else very sluggish and slowed down physically or mentally. Libby feels restless when she wants to enter the school. Furthermore after entering school, she restless the facing her new environment. The second type of Dysthymia, is feel hopeless before she became a member of MVB and she feels hopeless that becomes pessimistic entering school with a fat body. The second result are causes of Libby's Depression. The first is Influence of family. Libby has trauma the death of her mother and her father cannot treat Libby until she is depressed. The second is Other Factors. Libby feels difficult for her life when she get bullying from letters. The last result are effects of Libby's depression. First, the effect on herself is experiencing

anger where she receive many cruel and scathing comments, so that she wants to throw away all existing cellphones. Second, the effect on society is difficulties in living her life where the society only sees the physical condition and current situation.

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