

## THE MAIN CHARACTER'S DEPRESSION IN JASMINE WARGA'S MY HEART AND OTHER BLACK HOLES

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### Abstract

This research aims to discuss the depression of the main character in Jasmine Warga's My Heart and Other Black Holes. Depression has usually been too late to realize. When the depression comes to a suicide, people finally notice there is a case called depression. The research are to find out the symptoms of the depression that leads to a suicide attempt and the factors that help to overcome the depression. The descriptive qualitative method with a psychological approach is applied. The symptoms of depression found in the main character are: believing no one cares, loss of hope, living in the past, and self-centeredness. The factors that influence the main character Aysel to overcome her depression and canceling the suicide are her family, her partner Roman and Roman's mother. At the end, the main character, Aysel, is able to overcome her depression and decides to make a new better life.

**Keywords:** depression, symptom, factor

### INTRODUCTION

Depression is a mental illness. Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease a person's ability to function at work and at home. The bad impact of depression can make someone unable to stand the conditions. This makes them choose to die. Those depressed people will think of committing suicide.

The issue of depression as a sign of suicide is reflected in My Heart and Other Black Holes. My Heart and Other Black Holes (2015) is a best seller romantic novel written by Jasmine Warga and was published by Harper Collins. This novel talks about a sixteen-year-old teenager, Aysel who was obsessed of ending her life. Her mother had a new family and loved the new family more. She also had classmates who were never kind to her, and a father whose violent crime rocked her small town. Aysel was terrified that she would turn out to be a monster like her father. The main problem is she was not sure she had the courage to end her life alone. Then, she found a website with a section called Suicide Partners. Aysel found Roman, a teenage boy who was haunted by a family tragedy. They made a pact to be suicide partners. However, as their suicide pact became more concrete, Aysel began to question whether she really wanted to go through with it. Ultimately, she must choose between wanting to die

or trying to convince Roman to live so they could discover the potential of their energy together.

This novel is chosen because it is an interesting novel especially for the youth. This novel has many moral lessons about life and self-actualization. This novel tells the reader about the meaning of life when something bad happens, and it contains many good words. Some points of interests found in this novel are the followings. First is the character. Aysel wanted to end her life through suicide because of the problem that she cannot handle anymore. Secondly, the story is very interesting in a way which can make the readers feel the feeling of the characters. The highlight of the story is in the end, Aysel recanted her decision of committing suicide. It would be very interesting if the readers follow the story line and feel how to care for the closest people who give up because they faced so many problems in their lives. To focus the research, the formulation of the problem statements is as follows: (1) What are the symptoms of Aysel's depression as portrayed in this novel? and (2) What are the factors that help Aysel to overcome her depression?

## METHOD

In this research, the psychological approach is applied. Based on Ribeiro et. al's Depression and Psychodynamic Psychotherapy, Sigmund Freud explored the individual's reactions to an actual loss or disappointment associated to a loved person, or to a loss of an ideal. Plainly, he tried to explain why some people react with a mourning affect (surpassed after a period of time) and others succumb into melancholy (depression, as "we" now call it) (106). To be more particular, this research applies the theory of depression. Depression, according to Robert S. Wallerstein, MD, in Corveleyn et. al's The Theory and Treatment of Depression, is the main symptoms and complaints that bring its sufferers into the mental health care system (1). The method of data collecting in this research is library research. The primary data are taken from Jasmine Warga's My Heart and Other Black Holes published by Harper Collins in 2015. In analyzing the data for this research, the descriptive qualitative method is applied.

Depression, according to Longman Dictionary of American English is: "A medical condition that makes you very unhappy and anxious and often prevents you from living a normal life" (240). According to Layard in Richardson et. al's Journal of Mental Health, "depression is a significant cause of personal distress, social disability and economic cost for patients, families and society at large" (543). To help identify whether a person suffers depression or not, there are some symptoms of depression that can be viewed.

According to Martha L. Bruce in Williamson et. al's Physical Illness and Depression in Older Adults, the symptoms of depression are fatigue, sleep disturbance, and appetite disruption, have direct debilitating effects that result over time in functional decline and disability" (20) To complete with, there is also the anhedonia disorder as the depression symptoms. Anhedonia may reduce



motivation, leading to poor health behaviors. Based on Physical Illness and Depression in Older Adults, alternatively, the debilitating effects of depressive symptoms may work indirectly in that depressive symptom result in intermediary behaviors that then affect functional status (25). It is common that the depressed person will lose interests in many things. When this condition is ignored, this can lead into poor health condition.

There are ten major psychological symptoms of depression. For those suffered from depression, they can have some of the following symptoms. They are: appetite's change, insomnia, shunning responsibility, believing no one cares, feeling impossible to reach God, living in the past, self-centeredness, loss of hope, losing interest in one's surrounding, and difficulty in making decision.

Based on Mascella's Depression: Causes and Treatment, there are several possible causes of depression. They can range from biological to circumstantial. Common causes include: manifestations, such as early childhood trauma, brain structure, negative feelings about oneself, escapism and withdrawal, loss of emotional bonds, crying spells, loss response to mood, feeling of worthlessness, negative self-evaluation, family history, negative expectation, early childhood trauma, and self-recrimination (304).

In The Pharma Innovation: Depression-Symptoms, Causes, Medications and Therapies, Bhowmik et. al state that men appear to be particularly sensitive to the depressive effects of unemployment, divorce, low socioeconomic status, and having few good ways to cope with stress. Women who have been the victims of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, either as a child or perpetrated by a romantic partner are vulnerable to developing a depressive disorder as well (45). Men will most likely to suffer from depression rather than women.

According to Oxford Learner's Dictionary overcome means "to succeed in dealing with or controlling a problem that has been preventing you from achieving something" (1064). Overcoming depression means succeed in dealing or controlling the depression itself. For overcoming depression that someone faces, there are several things that can be the factors. According to Stroebe and Georgios in "Beyond Depression: Yearning for the Loss of a Loved One", "social support should reduce social loneliness that results from the absence of an engaging network. It should therefore have general beneficial effects on well-being and reduce depressive symptoms of bereaved and non-bereaved individuals alike" (8). As mentioned before, this social support could help depressed people to overcome by their depressions. The social supports include supports from family and friends.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Symptoms o Depression in Aysel**



There are four symptoms of depression found in the main character, Aysel. Aysel starts to feel that she lives but she feels empty. Aysel has some problems with the society, family, and friends, that she thinks never understand her. She always thinks in different way of herself, for example if she dies, everything will be better and all people around her can live happily. The following are the discussion on the symptoms of depression found in the main character, they are: believing no one cares, loss of hope, living in the past, and self-centeredness.

### ***Believing No One Cares***

The first symptom of depression found in Aysel is believing no one cares. Someone who was depressed will not trust anyone but his/her self. He/she feels that there is no one who cares about his/her anymore. He/she isolates his/her self from other people and environment, and he/she can lose the connections with others. Here, Aysel feels that no one cares about her, starting from her own family, her supervisor, and her friends. Aysel believes if she cannot be accepted in this world, and there is nobody wants her.

Aysel feels she cannot be accepted in the society, she thought when she could work in a telemarketing firm company, she can get better life and treatment from others, but in real life people still treat her bad because of her father. Even, her supervisor Mr. Palmer in the office always says something bad to her. It makes Aysel always think of ending her life. She believes no one cares. Below is a conversation between Aysel and Mr. Palmer: "You know, I took a risk, hiring you" He waves his wrinkled finger close to my face. "Everyone in this town told me you were trouble. Because of your..." He trails off and looks away. "*Because of your father*, I complete his sentence in my head (Warga 4). Mr. Palmer talks to Aysel about his fear of hiring her in his office. Mr. Palmer does not like her. He had been forced to hire Aysel and takes risks of the firm's image. Mr. Palmer knows that many people around him told that Aysel is a trouble. On the other hand, Aysel actually does not have any mistake to everyone. The problem is because Aysel's father is a murderer. Mr. Palmer is like many people in the town who always think bad of her. She receives all of those judgments and bad treatments from the society. It makes Aysel believe no one cares about her. It makes her frustrated and hopeless.

By all the situations that she faces, she becomes sure to end her life. She wants to end her life, but she is still afraid to do it by herself. She decides to find a suicide partner through Smooth passages which is a website for people who want to die.

I still haven't found one dedicated to the unwanted daughters of psychotic criminals, so for now Smooth Passages is the place for me. Smooth Passages' website is plain, no flashy or cheesy HTML



work. It's black and white. Classy. That is, if a website dedicated to suicide can be classy. Aysel was talking to herself (Warga 7).

Aysel really wants to end her life through suicide. Aysel thinks the best way to finish all the problems and the pains is when she is gone from this world. By all the things that she has been through, she becomes more obsessed to do suicide.

Aysel always believes her friends do not care for her. Aysel does not have close friend. She only has her classmates as her friends. Her classmates whisper and laugh behind her back. It is because her classmates know about her father's crime. Since then, there is no one who wants to become Aysel's friend. The following quotation that shows Aysel's classmate laugh at her is: "Uh," I mumble. "Uh'? Miss Seran, 'uh' is not a numerical answer". Mr Scoot leans back against the whiteboard. This makes the class laugh." The quotation is the conversation between Aysel and her teacher in the class. Aysel's classmate is happy when Aysel makes a mistake. It shows how Aysel's classmate does not like Aysel.

Aysel is a lonely person. The following quotation shows that Aysel is a lonely person: "Most everyone in the class leaves before they can write down the assignment. I stay seated and carefully jot it in my notebook. "Once the classroom is empty, I get up and leave" (Warga 17). The quotation shows how Aysel is in her class. She is always alone, and does not have any close friends in her class. She only has her classmates as her friends. But, her classmates do not like her because of her father's crime. Therefore, she always leaves when the classroom is empty it is because she does not want around with her classmates.

Aysel believes there is no one cares about her, not even her mother. Her parents were divorced after her father did the crime. Since Aysel's father is in the jail, he does not call or write Aysel a letter. It makes Aysel feel her father does not care about her anymore. Aysel has a mother who already has a new family. Aysel lives with her mother and her new family. She has a half-sister name Georgia and half-brother name Mike from her mother and her step father. All the situation in Aysel's live changes. This quotation shows that Aysel believes no one cares: "That all changed three years ago. Everything did. Now I live with her, Steve, Georgia, and Mike. She'd never say it, but I am an intruder in their happy home. An infestation. I've gone from being a bruise to an open festering wound. Evolution isn't always a positive thing" (Warga 20). The quotation shows Aysel's perspective on her mother. Aysel thinks that she is an intruder in her mother's family. She does not belong to her mother's family. Aysel thinks that she is the last option in her mother's life. It is just a responsibility as a mother to take care of her daughter. Aysel believes that her mother does not care about her, and Aysel feels that she is an old wound that stays in her mother's life. She feels enough in her mother's family. As seen

that she was said “I’ve gone from being a bruise to an open festering wound” it shows how she lives in pain and thinks that she is dying. Aysel thinks everything cannot be fine like before.

### ***Loss of Hope***

The second symptom of Aysel’s depression is loss of hope. Loss of hope is the situation of someone that thinks there is nothing to live for. Depressed people will lose their hopes. They will feel desperate and feel that there is nothing to struggle in their lives anymore. There is no hope for life. This symptom show how someone already gives up with anything, including desire and fear.

Having loss of hope symptom makes Aysel desperate. Aysel chooses suicide as the best way. She thinks there is nothing to live for. She feels bad for her mother. She always thinks it is better that she disappears from this world. The quotation that shows Aysel’s loss of hope is:

Without me, my mom won’t have to stay up at night, worrying that the criminal gene, the murderer gene, was passed to me and that any day now, I’m going to blow up the school or something awful like that. I know she doesn’t want to think about it, but deep down, I can see her struggling with her fear and her doubt. Her sideways glances and cautious probing questions are all her way of determining just how much of a mental case I am” (Warga 27)

In the quotation above, Aysel assumes that her mother really has a bad feeling about her. Aysel thinks that she has given a big burden for her mother. She wants her mother to live in peace and happy with her family, do not think the problems and the past. Aysel just wants to make the situation better, no fears and doubt anymore. She keeps thinking that she is the worst thing in her mother’s life. All the problems that happen because of her father make Aysel bear the burden.

### ***Living in the Past***

The third symptom of depression found in Aysel is living in the past. Living in the past is a depression symptom in which someone remembers only his/her past time, when everything is under his/her control. One does not want to face the fact nowadays. The past is not always good or bad, but when the reality is bad, the past is good and happy and conversely.

Aysel’s family is not the same as before. Her mother already has a new family. Aysel lives with her mother since her father is in jail, but Aysel still thinks about the past. When she is with her mother’s family, it makes her sad because she thinks of the past. The quotation that shows Aysel’s living in the past is:



My dad loved soft pretzels. He used to joke that they were one of the best things about life in America. He'd buy a cinnamon-sugar one for me and cheddar-cheese-and onion one for him. We'd stroll around the festival, pretzels in hand, pointing at the different rides and debating which ones we should check out. And in those rare moments, I felt at home (Warga 173)

As it is seen above, Aysel is plotting herself in the past. When she goes to the place that she and her father have visited before, it brings back the good memory. She remembers when she and her father went to the festival, and did things that they liked. They were eating their favorite cake, and have a good conversation. Another quotation that shows she still can feel the good memories:

When I was younger, my father used to pop a tape into his old boom box that he kept on the counter at his convenience store and would tell me a story of his childhood, playing chess with his father on a smooth board made of alabaster stone or measuring people's feet at the store, moving clumsily as the notes rose and fell with the tempo. (Warga 25)

As it is seen above, Aysel pictures her past with her father. Aysel recalls the good moment with her father. Sometimes the good memories that Aysel faced bring sad feeling. She still cannot receive the reality of her condition now. The good memory cannot make Aysel lives like the past. She only could live in the real situation in which her father is a murderer.

### ***Self-Centeredness***

According to James C. Johnson in his book Freedom for Depression self-centeredness itself is a condition of someone who only thinks about his/her self. She/he ignores everything and everyone. This person does not put attention to other people or what happens in his/her environment (147).

Aysel's self-centeredness can be seen when she thinks people hate her because of her father's fault. She ignores the truth that actually there are people who love her. Because she is a daughter of a murderer, she starts to focus on blaming herself. Aysel's self-centeredness is when she really wants to end herself by committing suicide. Aysel cannot reconcile with herself. She lives with the image of her father who is a murderer. She starts to think if she dies everything can be better for her and for all people around her.

The quotation that shows Aysel's self-centeredness is: "I'm tired of you spending every day feeling sorry for yourself just because of what your dad did (Warga 106). The statement is from Aysel's half sister, Georgia. Actually, Georgia doesn't hate Aysel. She just wants to be a close friend to

Aysel. She wants Aysel stop blaming herself for her father's crime. According to Georgia, it just makes a distance between her and Aysel. It shows how Aysel lives with her own perspective which is her self-centeredness. She has been busy with her own mind and never wants to know what people actually think about her. She is too afraid to receive the truth. Aysel's self-centeredness is when she thinks too much of herself. Aysel's self-centeredness makes her mind screwed up, then it becomes a symptom of depression that she faces now.

### **Factors that Help to Overcome Aysel's Depression**

According to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries overcome means "to succeed in dealing with or controlling a problem that has been preventing you from achieving something" (1064). Overcoming depression is situation when someone is successful in dealing with or controlling the depression itself.

There are several factors that influence someone to overcome depression. It can be done by the medical treatment and the social support. In this research, the factor that influences Aysel to overcome her depression is social support. According to Weiss based on online journal Beyond Depression: Yearning for the Loss of a Loved One "social support should reduce social loneliness that results from the absence of an engaging network. It should therefore have general beneficial effects on well-being and reduce depressive symptoms of bereaved and non-bereaved individuals alike" (8). The social support factors consist of family and friends. In this research, the writers found the factors that help Aysel to overcome her depression are her family, and her partner Roman.

### ***Aysel's Sister and Brother***

Aysel always felt unwanted by her family. She always thinks negatively about her family. Aysel lives with her mother and her new family. She has a step father, a half-sister named Georgia, and half-brother named Mike. She always thinks that her mother and her half-sister Georgia hate her. Actually, her family is not like what Aysel thinks.

Aysel's perspective to Georgia is different from the reality. Actually, Georgia wants to be close with Aysel. Georgia wants Aysel to enjoy her life more, and stop thinking herself as a burden to everyone. The quotation that shows Georgia cares to Aysel is: "I just wish you weren't so sad all the time" (Warga 107). Georgia says that she does not want Aysel to be sad. It means that Georgia wants Aysel to live with happiness. Georgia wants Aysel to live like she wants, not to think about her father's fault. Aysel cannot take all the people's judgement on being a daughter of a murderer. She deserves the right and the best thing that world could give to her. Georgia actually feels so bad about the burden that Aysel accepts.

Not only Georgia, Aysel's little brother Mike is the kindest person that Aysel knows. Her little brother is the one and only in her family who is close to her. Aysel's little brother just doesn't understand about adult problems. Mike always knows what Aysel likes, all her favorites. The quotation that shows how Mike loves Aysel is: "Make sure you add extra chocolate chips, Aysel loves chocolate chips" (Warga 107). This is when Mike talked to his mother to add chocolate chips for Aysel's pancake. It shows how Mike loves Aysel and care about Aysel. Mike's kindness to Aysel makes her become anxious and hard to think the date of doing suicide come. Actually, Aysel really likes her little brother but it not enough to make Aysel strong to run her life. The bad things always come to her mind and it makes the truth of heartfelt cannot be seen. Aysel starts to think again about anything. The one think that Aysel know, Mike is the one and only person that loves her in this world.

Another quotation that shows Mike gives good influence to Aysel is: "He stares at the covers and traces his fingers over the signature like he's hypnotized by it. Then he carefully places the comic on the table to him and stretches his arms out wide, pulling me into tight hug" (Warga 118). The quotation above is when Mike has his birthday. Aysel gives him a *The Amazing Spiderman* comic as Mike's birthday present. Actually, Aysel feels so happy when she looks at Mike's response. Mike shows sincere love still exists in Aysel's life. That feeling starts to fill Aysel's heart. Aysel sees how Mike keeps the present as Mike's friend wants to grab it with dirty fingers. Mike is angry and gives his friend a warning and then Mike looks over Aysel. What just happened makes Aysel feel touched. Aysel can feels that actually people around her especially Mike that give a positive energy to her life. The positive energy is Aysel can smile now and feels a little happiness in her life. It starts to influence her to overcome her depression.

### ***Roman and His Mother***

Roman is a teenage boy who has a complex situation too. He wants to end his life because of his sister's death. Roman and Aysel meet each other and planning to commit suicide together. During their togetherness, Aysel feels that they start to fill each other. They can share the feeling that already settles in their hearts. They are both messed up, and can understand each other is feelings. As time goes by, they are still close to each other.

Aysel starts to know more about Roman. Even Aysel already know Roman's family. Aysel feels Roman's mother is a good woman who has a bigheart to receive her daughter's death. She tries to make Roman feel fine, and did not blame himself for his sister's death because it is not Roman's fault. The quotation that shows Roman's mother loves Aysel is: "Roman's mom is waiting for us in the foyer. She grabs my face in her hands and pulls me close. "I'm just so glad you were able to make it. I really hope you enjoy the food." (Warga 133). The quotation shows when Aysel talks about Roman's mother. Roman's mother

invites Aysel for a dinner in her house. At first, Roman takes Aysel to his home. His mother is surprised when she knows Roman has a new friend. Because after Roman's sister death, Roman always stays in his room and never plays or hangs out with his friend again. Roman's mother has a good feeling for Aysel. She is happy and thinks that Aysel can bring happiness back to her son.

Roman's mother makes food for Aysel. Roman's mom makes a Turkish cuisine, when she knows that Aysel is Turkish. The quotation "I'm just to glad you were able to make it" (Warga 133) is shows Roman's mother sincerity to Aysel. Another quotation that shows Roman's mother gives good influence to Aysel is: "She'd held my face in her hands, much like how Mrs. Franklin did a moment ago, and she'd whispered to me in Turkish, I didn't understand any of it, so I'd pretended she was saying, "Everything will be okay, Aysel. It's all going to work out". (Warga 134) but in Aysel perspective it just makes another burden. She feels hard to see what happen next to Roman's mother when she knows her son will do suicide with her. The burden that Aysel feels make her thinks again about ending her life through suicide. Roman's mother convince her, and said that everything will be fine. Roman's mother likes her and knows that Aysel is going through a big problem in her life because her son has the same condition like Aysel.

It is so different from before. Aysel starts to fill her feeling with good things. The quotation "But deep down, what I know is this: Everything has changed." (Warga 229) shows the thoughts of Aysel. Roman gives Ayselan energy to make Aysel move to be a better person without Aysel realizing it. Aysel becomes close with Roman. They often go out and spend time together. Roman actually has the same feeling with Aysel. He feels happy and starts to fill with good things. His biggest regret to her sister still covers up his life, and he wants to amend all. While Roman still has a strong feeling to commit suicide, Aysel slowly changes and thinks that she can move on and deals with herself. The quotation "He's longer the person I want to die with; he's the person I want to be alive with." (Warga 231) shows how Aysel starts to think about persuading Roman not to do suicide she wants to be alive with Roman.

Aysel and Roman get close with each other. They share their minds, and their stories. She does not realize it at first, but slowly she feels only Roman can hear her and she always need Roman to listen to her problem. The quotation that Aysel wants Roman to listen to her is: "After a few minutes, I pick up my phone again and call Frozen Robot. I know it's stupid, but I can't help myself. I want to share my thoughts with someone, and he's the only person I could possibly talk to" (Warga 167) the quotation shows how Aysel starts to make Frozen Robot or Roman as her friend. Frozen Robot is a username of Roman in his suicide website.

Aysel starts to think of life because she wants to live happily with Roman. "Knowing you has helped me see things differently. And all I want is



for you to see yourself the way that I do.” (Warga 293) She wants everything go well and normal and she can help Roman to solve his problems too. She thinks she embrace Roman and they can have a better life.

Finally, at the end Aysel and Roman change their mind about doing suicide. Aysel is success to convince Roman. The quotation that shows Roman cancel his decision to commit suicide is:

He reached toward me, cupping my face in his hands. I lean in and out mouths meet. His lips are chapped and swollen, but the kiss is soft and light and perfect. “I’ll talk to you,” he whispers. “I promise.” His face still inches from mine. “I want to try and show you the person I see when I look at you, not the person you seemed to think you were. I guess I want to see the world differently.”

The quotation above shows Roman’s answer, Roman finally find the reason for being alive also. Roman wants to see the world differently, in another perspective he wants to see the world better. Roman also promises to Aysel, it means he wants to stay alive with Aysel because he wants to see Aysel as a better person. They finally save their lives.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the first problem statement in chapter one, there has been four symptoms found. The symptoms are: believing no one cares, loss of hope, living in the past, and self-centeredness. Aysel feels that no one cares about her, starting from her own family, her supervisor, and her friends. She lives with her mother’s new family since her parents divorced. She always thinks it is better for her to disappear from this world. Those symptoms happen and appear since Aysel’s father was arrested for killing someone. Aysel is admitting that she has been depressed because of her father. It makes her burdened.

On the second problem, the factor that helps Aysel to overcome her decision is social support, which is, her family and her suicide partner. Aysel does not know the truth that her family love her. Aysel’s half-sister Georgia and her brother Mike care and love her. It opens Aysel’s heart. The second one is Roman’s mother. They make Aysel feel wanted and loved in this world. Roman’s mother loves Aysel and likes her because she brings a good spirit to her son. The last is Roman himself. Aysel is falling in love with Roman. From all of the things that happen in Aysel’s life, she just needs love. Aysel and Roman get closer. They sharing their sadness, pain, and burden and finally she gets the reason for being alive. Roman convinces her to cancel her decision and Aysel do the same as Roman.

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