

---

## ANXIETY OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN THE NOVEL DO NO HARM

Andre Fahrezi Kusuma\*), Agnes Setyowati Hariningsih\*), Henny Suharyati\*)

\*)Universitas Pakuan, Bogor, Indonesia

Email correspondence: [andrefkw@gmail.com](mailto:andrefkw@gmail.com)

**Article History:** Accepted: August 1, 2024; Revised: September 10, 2024; Approved: October 1, 2024

---

### ABSTRACT

This study discusses the anxiety that arises from the trauma experienced by the main character. The novel *Do No Harm* by Christina McDonald, published in 2021, is used as the research corpus. The descriptive analysis method is applied in this research. The objective of this study is to show that anxiety significantly impacts the behavior of the main character. The research findings suggest that the main character's anxiety begins when her son, Josh, is diagnosed with cancer. This anxiety drives the protagonist to take various actions to solve the problem, but all of her efforts have negative consequences for herself and those around her. The content provided is an excerpt from the novel *Do No Harm*, which revolves around a complex web of events involving a murder investigation, drug dealing, and a family's struggle with a child's illness. The protagonist, Emma, becomes entangled in a situation where she discovers a connection between her family and a murder case. She is also drawn into illegal activities in an attempt to save her son's life. The story explores themes of moral dilemmas, family dynamics, and the consequences of difficult choices. The narrative is filled with tension, emotional turmoil, and ethical conflicts, making it a compelling and intricate storyline.

**Keywords:** Challenges; Difficulties; Immigrant; India; Canada

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

The introduction to the book "Do No Harm" presents a gripping narrative that delves into the complexities of human relationships and moral dilemmas. The protagonist, Emma, finds herself entangled in a web of events involving a murder investigation, drug dealing, and a family's struggle with a child's illness. The story is filled with tension, emotional turmoil, and ethical conflicts, making it a compelling and intricate storyline. As the plot unfolds, it explores themes of honesty, trust, and the darker aspects of human nature, creating a captivating and thought-provoking introduction to the novel.

Human are intelligent beings that have their own thoughts on certain things which makes them special. Human tends to seek a solution to relieve their anxiety. There are a lot of factors that cause anxiety in a person. Anxiety could remind of a trauma when a person facing heavy stress. Trauma is likely to occur when a person is under heavy pressure (Robinson et al., 2018).

Traumatic experiences are stored and processed in an unconscious form which is caused by tension from the social environment and psychology (Emira, S.A. & Zulaikha, A., 2024). For a person to overcome his trauma, they had to implement their ego into reality. By taking the unconscious feeling into awareness to know the reason for anxiety

(Tarzian et al., (2023). When someone is faced with a traumatic experience, the ego will implement a defense mechanism by projecting the anxiety to the outside world. Defense mechanism comes in the form of repression, sublimation, projection, displacement, rationalization, reaction formation, and regression.

Sigmund Freud with his psychoanalysis divides anxiety into id, superego, and ego. Anxiety is a feeling of fear that causes a serious symptom if it continues for a long time. (Hatta, K, 2016, para. 58). The symptoms shown by each person may vary depending on how the recipient reacts to it.

Such a condition is found in the novel *Do No Harm* by Christina McDonald which is the object of study of this research. This novel tells the story of Emma, a mother whose son is diagnosed with cancer. Due to the trauma of their childhood, Emma decided to steal drugs from the hospital where she worked to turn them into money. She had involved various people including her family and acquaintances. In the end, she successfully cures her son, but it costs other people's happiness and also her own husband's life.

In the novel *Do No Harm*, there are some issues that can be used in the form of an element. The element in question is psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud. In this paper author focuses on the anxiety experienced by the main character of the novel.

## II. METHODS

The research method used in this paper is the descriptive analysis method, which involves

describing the phenomena occurring within the main character, explaining the impact of anxiety on the character, and analyzing how the character deals with anxiety. Data were obtained through library research, with the primary source being the novel, and secondary sources including books of theory as well as internet references.

In this study, the writer used several theories to support the analysis. These include intrinsic theories of character, plot, and background, which are complemented by Sigmund Freud's extrinsic psychoanalytic theory.

Based on the content provided, the book *Do No Harm* appears to be a work of fiction, likely a novel or narrative that explores complex moral and ethical dilemmas. The narrative seems to revolve around the experiences and decisions of the characters, particularly the protagonist, Emma, as they navigate through challenging circumstances. The book appears to delve into themes of justice, sacrifice, and the lengths to which individuals will go to protect their loved ones.

In addition to the exploration of these themes, the narrative focuses heavily on character development and the exploration of intricate, emotionally charged situations. The characters' personal struggles and the decisions they face are central to the story's unfolding.

Therefore, the "methodology" of this book is likely centered around the art of storytelling, character development, and the exploration of moral and ethical complexities within a fictional context. It

aims to engage readers through a compelling narrative that presents thought-provoking scenarios and emotional dilemmas.

### III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The story is told in first-person narration. Emma is the main character of the novel and represents the id. The id is a natural instinct that prioritizes pleasure and has no direct connection with the conscious mind (Ardiansyah et al., 2023). Emma lives with her husband, Nate, and son, Josh, in Skamania, a part of the United States.

The content provided is an excerpt from a novel titled *Do No Harm*. The story follows the protagonist, Emma, as she becomes entangled in a complex web of events involving a murder investigation, drug dealing, and a family's struggle with a child's illness. Throughout the narrative, Emma faces moral dilemmas, ethical conflicts, and the consequences of difficult choices. The story is filled with tension, emotional turmoil, and intricate family dynamics. As the plot unfolds, Emma's involvement in illegal activities to save her son's life adds layers of complexity to the narrative. The novel delves into themes of justice, sacrifice, and the lengths to which individuals will go to protect their loved ones. The conclusion of the book is not provided in the excerpt, but it is likely to involve the resolution of the various conflicts and moral dilemmas faced by the characters, potentially providing closure to the intense and compelling storyline.

The excerpt reveals Emma's involvement in illegal activities, including drug distribution, to save her son's life. She becomes entangled in a situation where she discovers a connection between her family and a murder case. The story explores themes of justice, sacrifice, and the lengths to which individuals will go to protect their loved ones.

The narrative is filled with tension, emotional turmoil, and intricate family dynamics. Emma's involvement in illegal activities adds layers of complexity to the storyline. The novel also explores the impact of these events on her relationships with her family members, particularly her brother, Ben. The excerpt provides glimpses of intense dialogue and interactions between the characters, shedding light on their motivations, fears, and the difficult choices they face. The narrative is compelling and thought-provoking, as it navigates through the ethical and emotional challenges encountered by the characters. Overall, the novel *Do No Harm* presents a gripping and intricate storyline, delving into the complexities of human nature, moral dilemmas, and the consequences of one's actions (McDonald, 2021: 147).

If the plot sounds preposterous, consider McDonald's very personal inspiration for the book. Her own brother was addicted to OxyContin and overdosed. The book is dedicated to him. McDonald notes that the medication to which he became hooked was prescribed to him by a physician and "perfectly legal." For quite some time, she wanted to write a book set against the backdrop of the American opioid

crisis, and her strong opinions and emotions are on display in her fictional narrative. One day, McDonald happened upon a news story about a podiatrist involved in an opioid ring. “I wondered why he did it: was it money, power, status?” McDonald relates. “What would drive someone to do that? And I thought, what would make me sell opioids amidst a horrific epidemic? The only answer I had was love. My children. And that was the moment I first thought of the story for *Do No Harm*.”

As the story opens, Emma and Nate are happy, still deeply in love after several years of marriage, and fully committed to each other, their marriage, and their son. But Emma is a woman with secrets she has kept from Nate because, for her, it had proven “easy to hide the darker side of yourself from others, even those you loved. To hide fear and sadness, anger and hostility. The mask was easy. It was honesty, openness, and trust that were truly difficult in marriage.” Both Emma and Nate have successful, satisfying careers in the small fictional town of Skamania, Washington, which McDonald fashioned after Snoqualmie. McDonald says it was very important to her that the town be named Skamania because, in Cascades Chinook, it means “swift waters,” and she knows all too well that “circumstances can change very fast once a person becomes addicted.” Indeed, she immediately places her characters in some very deep, swiftly running, dramatic waters. Nate is assigned to investigate the homicide of a local informant who was heavily involved in drug trafficking but is warned that he will

be removed from the case if the evidence leads back to Emma’s brother, from whom she has been estranged for years. He has a criminal history and is suspected of being the leader of a drug ring. Only in a small town with a small police force would such a potential conflict of interest be disregarded. But it’s the plot device needed to set in motion the series of developments that frenetically propel the story forward (McDonald, 2021: 188).

Because of her own complicated past, Emma knows just who to go to in order to sell the prescriptions. She turns to Gabe, her old boyfriend whom she has kept a secret from Nate, confident that he will be able to sell the prescriptions quickly so she can get the cash she needs to ensure that Josh receives the first treatment before his condition worsens. After she negotiates the deal, money begins rolling in. However her behavior takes an immediate toll on her and her relationships with her family. Nate begins to suspect that something other than Josh’s illness is amiss, and they start drifting apart because Emma knows she will not be able to hide the truth from him indefinitely. Emma is on high alert, edgy, and sneaking around in fear of the severe, life-altering consequences she will face if she is caught. Each count of unlawful distribution of OxyContin by a medical professional could net her a twenty-year prison sentence and cause her to lose the career she loves and her family. McDonald credibly portrays her singular focus on seeing to it that Josh is provided the best possible chance to survive. Her internal struggle is heartbreakingly believable, especially

when she lapses into moments of believing that she is actually providing a service to those suffering from intractable pain who cannot obtain medication via legitimate means. Emma justifies her behavior, arguing that “sometimes we have to do the wrong thing for the right reason. Maybe it was wrong to sign those prescriptions... The ends justify the means. Everything I’ve done is for the right reason” (McDonald, 2021: 263).

*Do No Harm* is a thoroughly riveting thriller, replete with surprising, intricately constructed plot developments and revelations. There is no imaginable character more empathetic than a mother driven to save her deathly ill child, no matter the cost to herself. McDonald capably portrays not just Emma’s anguish, but that of Nate and Nate’s mother, as well. Josh is a charming little boy who asks questions that no child should ever have to pose to his parents, and the unscrupulous characters with whom Emma becomes entangled are equally believable. McDonald does not shy away from developments in the story that are logical, but heartbreaking, and keeps accelerating the pace right up to a shocking and controversial conclusion. At numerous junctures, she offers readers the opportunity to ponder what they would do should they find themselves in similar circumstances, making *Do No Harm* an excellent choice for book clubs. McDonald acknowledges that her goal was to “get people talking about the opioid epidemic, discussing the driving factors behind it and what we as a society can do to help those who struggle.” She

has succeeded: the issues she examines provide plenty of material to discuss and debate.

The relationship between Emma and her son, Josh, is close. She adores her son so much as he was part of her life. “Marrying him, being a mom, had given me a chance to belong to a real family” (McDonald, 2021, para. 13). The main character has been anxious since childhood after her parent’s death, assuming that she doesn’t belong to anyone other than her own family. Parental affection may promote adolescents to gain confidence (McAdams et al., 2017).

The anxiety of the main character begins after she gets a call from the hospital that her son has been diagnosed with cancer. The id has become dominant, which comes from the maternal instinct of the main character. At the stage of shock, a person might experience emotional disorientation, causing a quick response (Spytska, L., 2023). Due to the surge of adrenaline, the main character focuses on seeing her son, who is hospitalized, without caring about her surroundings. “An elderly woman was struggling to open the door at the bottom of the stairwell. I pushed past her and barreled through” (McDonald, 2021, para. 40).

There are side effects when a person is unable to adapt to changes (Hidayat, L. N. & Harsono, M., 2021). Due to anxiety that surpasses the main character’s mental capacity, she experiences a flashback when she lost both her parents in an accident during childhood. She blamed herself for being unable to help them. Experiencing trauma in

childhood places an overwhelming burden on future trauma (Robinson et al., 2018). The cost of living was high, especially for healthcare and education. Emma's family barely has enough money to treat Josh due to Emma's debt from medical school. Driven by traumatic disorder and the fear that she might lose one of her family again if she doesn't act fast, she tries selling drugs illegally to pay for treatment. "Drugs had ruined my brother's life, but maybe they could save Josh's" (McDonald, 2021: 57).

During transactions, Emma's cartel associate dies of an overdose in front of her. She decides to dispose of the bodies in the waterfall to remove any traces of their activities from the police. "I wasn't going to let my son die... 'We have to get rid of her body'" (McDonald, 2021: 90). Once she is told that the cartel is her brother's wife, she feels guilty and scared because she hasn't seen him since he was kicked out of the foster family. Rationalization distorts reality with certain pretexts that seem to make sense, even when they threaten the ego (Ja'Far, 2015: 6). Depression leads her to brag that she will keep them under the radar by manipulating her husband, whose job is a detective.

*It's exactly because my husband's a cop that we're safe. I can read his reports, check his notes, and lead him away from us. Besides, no one would ever expect a doctor to be involved in an opioid prescription ring, let alone a cop's wife* (McDonald, 2021: 146).

Emma sees Carlos Martinez near the hospital, who is related to Santiago Martinez, a cartel figure, which makes her feel insecure. Because of the tension of the id, which arises from a sense of danger, she decides to buy a gun to protect herself. "I nodded and smiled. 'My husband's a detective. He already explained it to me. I'll head over to the sheriff's office and do that next'" (McDonald, 2021: 187). In the United States, one must pass through various interviews and tests by the government to get a license to possess a firearm (Washington State Legislature, 2023). Emma lies to obtain a gun as soon as possible, without a permit.

Emma tails her husband into an abandoned house, fearing that he is going to kill her brother. She barges in without thinking, which gives Santiago Martinez the chance to shoot. Nate is killed while protecting her from the gunshot with his body, which makes her believe it was her fault that led him to his death. Filled with remorse, Emma cries in desperation, begging her husband to stay alive. "Baby, stay with me!" I cried (McDonald, 2021: 255).

Dr. Palmer knocks down Emma, demanding the drugs she hides. He arrogantly claims that he was the one who killed Emma's parents in a car crash under the influence of alcohol. He didn't want to save them because he had to protect his dignity and his license as a doctor. "Fury opened in my veins, oozing through me, black and bilious. He was corrupt. Greedy. Arrogant" (McDonald, 2021: 279). Emma was enraged by the fact that his greediness had

involved her family. She felt betrayed because Dr. Palmer had been very kind to her after her parents' death. Unable to hold her wrath, Emma kills him, satisfying the id: "I wiped the gun down with my shirt and pushed it into Dr. Palmer's limp hand... I pressed the barrel to his temple" (McDonald, 2021: 280).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this research, which has been explained in the previous section, the main character in the novel *Do No Harm* is experiencing anxiety caused by childhood trauma. This anxiety arises due to a traumatic disorder that leads to conflict between the id and the superego. Parental affection also plays a role in the main character's psychological development.

The impact of anxiety has overwhelmed the main character's psychological condition. The anxiety occurs when her son is diagnosed with cancer. Flashbacks of trauma deal a significant burden on the mental state of the main character, leading her to acute stress.

Based on the provided content, the conclusion of the book *Do No Harm* is not explicitly outlined. However, the narrative seems to be leading toward a resolution of the various conflicts and moral dilemmas faced by the characters. The conclusion may involve the characters coming to terms with their choices, finding closure in the murder investigation, and potentially resolving the family's struggles with illness and illegal activities. The conclusion is likely to provide a sense of resolution

and closure to the complex and intense storyline presented in the excerpt.

The main character deals with anxiety by applying a defense mechanism called neurotic anxiety. Neurotic anxiety experienced by the main character forces her to implement the id into one-sided actions that ignore the superego, which is deemed an obstacle to obtaining satisfaction.

Based on the provided content, the book *Do No Harm* seems to explore complex and morally challenging situations. The protagonist, Emma, becomes entangled in a web of events involving a murder investigation, drug dealing, and a family's struggle with a child's illness. Throughout the narrative, Emma is faced with moral dilemmas, ethical conflicts, and the consequences of difficult choices.

The book delves into the theme of the lengths to which individuals will go to protect their loved ones. It also explores the impact of these events on relationships, particularly within Emma's family. The narrative is filled with tension, emotional turmoil, and intricate family dynamics.

The excerpt provides glimpses of intense dialogue and interactions between the characters, shedding light on their motivations, fears, and the difficult choices they face. The novel seems to present a thought-provoking exploration of the complexities of human nature, moral dilemmas, and the consequences of one's actions.

The advice from this book may revolve around the ethical and emotional challenges encountered by the characters, highlighting the importance of making difficult choices and the impact of those choices on individuals and their relationships. It may also emphasize the theme of sacrifice and the lengths to which people are willing to go for the well-being of their loved ones.

## REFERENCES

- [1.] Ardiansyah, A., Sarinah, S., Susilawati, S., & Juanda, J. (2023). KAJIAN PSIKOANALISIS SIGMUND FREUD in *Jurnal Kependidikan*, 7(1), 25–31.
- [2.] Emira, S.A. & Zulaikha, A. (2024). Pengalaman Traumatis Sebagai Penyebab Gangguan Jiwa Psikotik Akut. In *Observasi: Jurnal Publikasi Ilmu Psikologi*, 2(2), 103–111. <https://doi.org/10.61132/observasi.v2i3.409>.
- [3.] Hatta, Kusmawati. (2016). Trauma Dan Pemulihannya: Suatu Kajian Berdasarkan Kasus. Banda Aceh: Dakwah Ar-Raniry Press. <https://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id/id/eprint/2381/>.
- [4.] Hidayati, L.N. & Harsono, M. (2021). Tinjauan Literatur Mengenai Stres Dalam Organisasi. *Jurusan Manajemen FE UNY*. DOI: 10.21831/Jim.v18i1.39339
- [5.] Ja'far, Suhermanto. (2015). Struktur Kepribadian Manusia Perspektif Psikologi dan Filsafat. Surabaya: UIN Sunan Ampel. <https://doi.org/10.15575/psy.v2i2.461>
- [6.] McAdams, T. A., Rijdsdijk, F. V., Narusyte, J., Ganiban, J. M., Reiss, D., Spotts, E., Neiderhiser, J. M., Lichtenstein, P., & Eley, T. C. (2017). Associations Between the Parent-Child Relationship and Adolescent Self-Worth: A Genetically Informed Study of Twin Parents and Their Adolescent Children. In *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines*, 58(1), 46–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12600>
- [7.] McDonald, Christina. (2021). *Do No Harm*. Gallery Books.
- [8.] Robinson, L., Smith, M. & Segal, J. (2018). Emotional and Psychological Trauma. <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/coping-with-emotional-and-psychological-trauma.htm>
- [9.] Spytyska, L. (2023). Psychological Trauma and Its Impact on a Person's Life Prospects. In *Scientific Bulletin of Mukachevo State University. Series "Pedagogy and Psychology,"* 9(3), 82-90. doi: 10.52534/msu-pp3.2023.82.
- [10.] Tarzian, M., Ndrio, M., & Fakoya, A. O. (2023). An Introduction and Brief Overview of Psychoanalysis. In *Cureus*, 15(9): e45171. doi:10.7759/cureus.45171.
- [11.] Washington State Legislature. (2023). Revised Code of Washington. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=9.41.070>