

**MANUSCRIPT PUBLICATION**

**CHILD ABUSE IN DAVE PELZER'S TRILOGY**

***A CHILD CALLED IT (1993), THE LOST BOY (1995), AND***

***A MAN NAMED DAVE (1999)***



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**ABSTRACT**

*This research paper analyzes child abuse that is reflected in Dave Pelzer's trilogy A Child Called it, The Lost Boy, and A Man Named Dave. The objectives of the research are to identify the context of the production of the trilogy, to analyze the influence of environment on the personality development of the author, and to review the reflection and criticism of the author towards child abuse. The research paper belongs to qualitative research. The sources of data come from both primary data source and secondary data sources. The method to analyze the data is descriptive analysis. The researcher finds the main finding in which there is relationship between the trilogy and the American society at the end of the twentieth century. Specifically, the study comes to the following conclusion: first, there is a close relationship between the productions of trilogy and the American society at the end of twentieth century ;and second, through the trilogy, the author conveys his critique to parents, society and the victims.*

*Key words: child abuse, a child called it, the lost boy, a man named dave.*

**A. Introduction**

Pelzer's trilogy *A Child Called it, The Lost Boy, and A Man Named Dave* are good books. It can be seen from two objectives of the story that Pelzer stated in the book. Pelzer (1993: 96) said that the first objective of the story is "to inform the reader how a loving, caring parent can change to a cold, abusive monster venting frustrations on a helpless child". The second objective is "the eventual survival and triumph of the human spirit over seemingly insurmountable odds" (Pelzer, 1993: 96-97).

From the first objective, Pelzer tries to tell the reader that child abuse victims who hide their past deep inside someday will apply the abuse to spouse and children. They will behave as they were taught as children. The cycle of

abuse then runs. By the trilogy, he tells that the cycle of abuse can be broken and he has proved it. As what Pelzer said (1993: 97) "I broke the cycle and became a father whose only guilt is that of spoiling his son with love and encouragement". However, the books contain more than a story of survival but a story of victory and celebration. Pelzer proves that he will not be like mother who is abusive. The way to be like that is by forgiving mother and becoming a good father for his son.

In addition, Pelzer brings a message to abused children and those who work with them. He encourages the victims to survive. Pelzer also gives seminars and workshops to others in need, helping the abused children to break their chains. Pelzer hopes they can overcome the dark side and press on to a brighter world (Pelzer, 1993: 97). He also encourages people around the abused child to be aware of abuse.

The issue appeared in the books is child abuse in California, San Francisco, United States. Van der Kolk et al (2001) said that childhood abuse and neglect is a serious problem in the United States; each year, over three million children are reported abused or neglected. Myers reported that by 1974, some 60,000 cases were reported. In 1980, the number exceeded one million. By 1990, reports topped two million, and in 2000, reports were around three million. In the early – twentieth first century, reports declined but remained high.

When a parent or caretaker acts, or fails to act in a way that presents imminent risk of serious harm to a child, it is considered abuse (Harris, 2010). Barker (in Huraerah, 2007: 47) defines abuse as "improper behavior intended to cause physical, psychological, or financial harm to an individual or group." Furthermore Richard (in Huraerah, 2007: 47) says that child abuse is "intentional acts that result in physical or emotional harm to children."

Harris (2010) says that there are four types of abuse such as: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. There are some studies about those four kinds of abuse. The first study is from Irish journal of applied social studies with the title *Child Abuse and Neglect and American Indians* (2008). This

journal is authored by National Indian Welfare Association (NICWA) namely Terry L. Cross and David Simmons. The second study comes from article entitled *Child Abuse in America: Slaughter of the Innocents* (1977) written by James W. Prescott. The third is about sexual abuse in Ireland. It is from Irish journal of applied and social studies entitled *Child Sexual Abuse in Ireland: an Historical and Anthropological Note* (1998). The writer is Kevin Lalor. The fourth comes from journal of emotional abuse. The title is *Effects of Emotional Abuse in Family and Work Environments* (2005). It is written by Rachel E. Goldsmith and Jennifer J. Freyd.

However, Kolk et al (2001) shows in their journal that neglect is the most and followed by physical abuse then sexual abuse and the least is emotional abuse. Neglect is the failure to provide for the child's basic needs. Physical abuse is physical aggression directed by an adult. It can involve punching, striking, kicking, shoving, slapping, burning, pulling ears or hair, stabbing, choking or shaking a child. Child sexual abuse is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent abuses a child for sexual stimulation. Emotional abuse is defined as the production of psychological and social deficits in the growth of a child as a result of behavior such as loud yelling, coarse and rude attitude, inattention, harsh criticism, and denigration of the child's personality.

To analyze the trilogy with child abuse as the topic, the writer is using Sociology of Literature theory. Sociology of literature comes from the words sociology and literature. Sociology is a science that studies whole network of relationships between people in society. The literature is a collection of tools for teaching. The meaning of literature to be more specific with the word 'literature' means the collection of good works (Ratna, 2003:1).

Sociology and literature have a close relationship. Sociology studies the real life, whereas literature is created based on the social phenomena. Literature is a work of art which expresses of human life and the conflicts on

society, especially concern with law, religion and norms, economic and politic. Both sciences have the same object that is human in society (Ratna, 2003: 2).

The object of sociology and literature is human being in society (Ratna, 2003: 3). Ratna (2003: 4) says that the nature of sociology is objectivity whereas the nature of literary works is the subjectivity and creativity. She (2003: 10) adds that fundamental problems of sociology of literature is literature itself. However, the goal of literary sociology is to increase the understanding of the literature in relation to society (Ratna, 2003, 11). Ratna (2003,11) also declares that literature is not merely an individual phenomenon but also social phenomena.

However, sociology and literature is influencing and complementing each other. They are instruments to understand the social conditions of a society in a certain period of time. According to Swingewood and Laurenson (1972:13), it would seem that literature and sociology are not wholly distinct discipline but, on the contrary complement each other in our understanding of society, historically they have tended to remain apart. In addition, a literary work is not only influenced by society but also can influence a society. Therefore, literature can be studied and analyzed by using the sociological perspective because it is the part of society. Because of that reason, the writer will observe how the phenomena of child abuse at the time of the production of the trilogy by using sociological theory.

## **B. Research Method**

This study belongs to qualitative study. The subject of the study is trilogy books written by Dave Pelzer entitled *A Child Called It: One Child's Courage to Survive* (1993), *The Lost Boy: A Foster Child's Search for the Love of a Family* (1995), and *A Man Named Dave: A Story of Triumph and Forgiveness* (1999) published by Health Communications, Inc. The sources of the data come from both primary data source, that is Dave Pelzer's trilogy and secondary data sources are from websites about author's biography, the trilogy, child abuse and

the social background of American society at the end of the twentieth century, and some books about Child Abuse theory and Sociological theory. The method to analyze the data is descriptive analysis.

### **C. Main Finding**

In this study, the researcher analyzes the trilogy using Sociological approach. Sociological approach analyzes human in society by which the process comes from a society to an individual. The writer analyzes the trilogy through the Sociological approach because she finds that the story in the books has a correlation to the theory of sociology and the social background of American society in the late twentieth century. The analysis is broken down into some aspects namely social, economy, politic, religion, culture, and science and technology.

#### **1. Social Aspect**

Dave Pelzer's trilogy *A Child Called It*, *The Lost Boy* and *A Man Named Dave* reflect the social aspects of American society in the late twentieth century. The aspects contain the social structure, the social status and the social relationship.

The social structure of American society consists of three namely higher class, middle class, and lower class. However, the author doesn't mention the higher, middle, or lower class in the trilogy. There is only one statement that David's family is white. The family is reflected as Brady Bunch of the 1960 whether Brady Bunch is white. The American people judge that white people are higher than the black and the other.

In the years before I was abused, my family was the "Brady Bunch" of the 1960s (ACCI: 15).

In addition, the society differentiates foster children from common children. Foster children are lower than common children.

They are being humiliated because they are being thrown away by their own family. The American society underestimated on foster care.

David, I don't know why it is, but for some reason a great deal of individuals look down on foster care (TLB: 124).

The social status of society is divided into three: rich, middle and poor. In the side of social status, most of the social status of the characters are middle. It can be seen from the job of the characters, such as secretary, school nurse, the principal Mr Hansen, the teacher Miss Woods, Mr Ziegler and Mrs. Woodworth, police officer Smith, fireman Stephen Joseph, etc.

My father, Stephen Joseph, supported his family as a fireman, working in the heart of San Francisco (ACCI: 15).

In the side of social relationship, the characters have a family relationship because it is mentioned in the novels about father, mother, brother, grandmother, aunt and uncle. They live as nuclear family that consists of a married couple with a number of children. They don't stay with extended family like grandmother, uncle and aunt.

The relationship among family members was good before. They lived happily. Then, the attitude of David's mother changed as she frequently consumed alcohol. The worst thing was that David had no longer become a part of the family. He was not allowed to have eaten together with family, to have sleep in a nice bed, to have a rest in bathroom, or to have fun in picnic. He was nobody, he was called *it*.

You are a nobody! An It! You are nonexistent! You are a bastard child! I hate you and I wish you were dead! Dead!" (ACCI: 82)

In addition, the relationship between David's family and neighbor was not good. Mother seldom visited neighbor. She and her children spent almost their time at home. Moreover, the people were individual who only minded their own home.



Mother rarely spent much time with neighbors (ACCI: 72)

David also didn't have friends at school. No one wanted to play with him because he was smell and never changed cloth. He also had ever caught in the act as a thief. He was outcast.

At school I was a total outcast. No other kid would have anything to do with me (ACCI: 36).

## **2. Economic Aspect**

The decade of the 1920s that was as the Golden Twenties was characterized by widespread prosperity. During the prosperity of the Golden twenties, many Americans made spent money with ease. After enjoying the Golden Twenties, American had a terrible situation that's called the Great Depression. The Great Depression was a severe worldwide economic depression in the decade preceding World War II and it was started in about 1939 and ended 1945.

The book *A Man Named Dave* states about the great depression. David's grandmother rose her children in the great depression without a husband. Her husband passed away. She felt difficult to raise two children. Therefore, the mother was grown by tight way.

Okay, I thought, maybe Grandmother was overbearing. When her husband passed away, leaving her to raise two children in the middle of a depression, Grandmother had to be stern. (AMND: 196-197)

In *A Man Named Dave*, it is also stated that America faced a statewide recession in 1978. It was difficult to find a job.

Jobs right now are scarce with the recession and all, (AMND: 228)

## **3. Political Aspect**

The United States is a federal constitutional republic in which the President, Congress, and judiciary share powers reserved to the national government, and the federal government shares sovereignty

with the state governments. Politics is divided into two namely domestic policy and foreign policy. Domestically, American policy is broken down into three: legislative, executive, and judiciary. Foreignly, U.S. 's ideology is capitalism and method of the distribution is imperialism.

However, American foreign policy is illustrated in the book *A Man Named Dave*. *A Child Called It* and *The Lost Boy* do not mention political aspect. The political aspect mentioned is only foreign policy not domestic policy. It is stated about Saddam Hussein's invasion to Kuwait in which America involved in this war. America supposed to help the world to solve the controversial.

In August 1990, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait shifted my priorities. (AMND: 216)

#### **4. Religious Aspect**

The characters in the trilogy are mostly Catholics. Catholics believe that there is only one God and argue that he has revealed himself as the trinity. They hold the Old Testament as their scripture while Protestant made some changes from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Some Christians believe in the original scripture, the Old Testament. Therefore, the characters in this trilogy believe in Catholic.

Four days later, on a foggy Monday morning, I parked Mr Turnbough's car in front of the same Catholic church Ron, Stan, and I had briefly attended with our aunt years ago as preschoolers. (AMND: 97)

Besides, David was religious for having a bible. The bible is mentioned as the place to keep his brother's letter.

For now all I could do was replace my brother's letter in my Bible, and pray for the best. (AMND: 121)

Moreover, David's family celebrated Christmas since the Holy days of Christians are Christmas, Easter, New Year, Pentecost, Saints'

Feast Days. It is the day when Christians believe of Jesus was born. it is celebrated generally on December 25.

As Christmas Day came nearer, my brothers and I became more and more excited. (ACCI: 18)

## 5. Cultural Aspect

The cultural aspect is broken down into three: mental facts, social facts, and physical facts. Mental facts consist of norms, way of life, and value-system. Social facts include custom and tradition. Physical facts such as fashion, artefact, and literature.

Viewed from mental facts, the writer breaks it into three. First, the society believed that people had to mind their own business. They took care of their own house and other people had not a right to interfere. At that time, what in the house should be closed. The members of the family would not tell what happened in the house or what problem they had faced.

"I have no idea what happened back then. That's not my affair. What happens in someone's house stays in their house. It's no one else's business. I see no need to open up Pandora's box." (AMND: 129)

The second, it is stated that harshness in children at that time was not categorized as an abuse but it was an act to discipline them. Everyone might see the harshness but they could not do anything. It was because there weren't a great Penal Codes to protect kids.

"Anyway, anybody could see what she was doing. Back then there was nothing we could have done, or were allowed to do. Back then it was considered discipline, parental rights, but we had to do something. Any one of us could see what was going on. It's something you don't forget. Ever." (AMND: 233)

The third, the society had also seen Foster Child blindly. They looked down to foster children for not having parents.

Other times I'd happily state, "I'm a foster child!" I was proud to be a member of my new family. I began to repeat this saying until one day one of the older foster children pulled me aside at school, warning me not to tell anyone "what" I was because " a lot of folks don't like our kind." (TLB: 50)

In social facts, American used to drink alcohol. People used to keep their problems without sharing and solving them. They always ran away from their problems by drinking alcohol and they didn't try to solve the problems. Therefore, drinking alcohol is a custom and becomes the habit of American society.

American tradition to celebrate Holy Days is also reflected in the nbook *A Child Called it*. David's family used to celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Halloween.

That year Thanksgiving dinner was a flop. In some kind of gesture of good faith, Mother allowed me to eat at the table with the family (ACCI: 87-88).

Physical fact appears in the novel that is literature. David mentions in the third book *A Man Named Dave* that he wrote *A Child Called it* and *The Lost Boy*.

In the fall of 1992, while doing a series of fact checks for *A Child Called "It"*, (AMND: 229-230)

## **6. Science and Technology Aspect**

Twentieth century was a time that started with horses, simple automobiles, and freighter but ended with luxury sedans, cruise ships, airlines and space shuttle. In addition, mass media, telecommunications and information technology made the world's knowledge more widely available to people. It is shown in Pelzer's trilogy from what the characters had and did in the story of *A Child Called It*, *The Lost Boy* and *A Man Named Dave*.

For communication, David's family had telephone. For information, David's family also had television. Besides, David's family also had radio for media of information. There is also stereo in David's house. The stereo was played at Christmas. The stereo was also used to play romance song to dance David's father and mother.

The policeman asks for my address and telephone number (ACCI: 12).

In transportation, David's mother had her own car. She used it to drive and pick children up to and from school. The station wagon was also used to have family picnic. Furthermore, David had a bicycle. David also had minibike and car. There were also planes. David flied planes after joining U.S. airforce. It means that the transportation had developed well.

My body slid from my seat, and I thought for sure I'd fall out of the plane as the Boeing 727 made a sudden sharp roll to the right (AMND: 31).

#### **D. Discussion and Conclusion**

The social aspect reflected in *A Child Called it*, *The Lost Boy*, and *A Man Named Dave* can be seen from the social status of the characters who work as teachers, headmaster, nurse, police, and fireman. These professions belong to middle class. The trilogy also tells that they live adequacy and do not look rich. The social class is shown only about white family without comparing with blacks or the other class. The only difference that stands out is the foster children look inferior to the common children. Beside from the characters, the social class can be seen from the characterization. The mother has a bad character like mad and lazy, screaming, drinking alcohol, and cussing. The person who has that character is uneducated. In addition, it can be seen from the ungrammatical structure used by mother in speaking such as 'em'. Since educated person will speak the

standard language, it means that the mother is uneducated because she uses slang.

The problem reflected in this book is bad social relation among family members and their relationship with the neighbors. The father spends his days for working and rarely being at home, while the mother and children mostly stay at home and not mingle with neighbors. The disappearance of father in the middle of family makes the mother feels heavy in parenting. The mother is so irritable when she sees her children doing a small mistake. Even mother will give punishment both physical and psychological punishment to the children. This condition causes child abuse. Moreover, the American society have individual characteristic. They mind their own home without interfering others. In this case, the neighbors see the abuse in David's home but they do nothing. Because of this, the issue of child abuse reminds high from year to year.

In economic aspect, the setting of time in the trilogy is American society faced recession. In recession, it was difficult to find job and the people lived in poverty. The difficulty in economic aspect can cause child abuse. Parents can ignore children's needs such as food, cloth, medicine or education because they don't have money. The trilogy tell about father's job as a fireman who spends almost his time for working; while mother is a housewife who almost stays at home without earning money. In this case, mother forgets David's needs on food and cloth. She also ignore about David's health. Beside that, the depression of the lack of money can encourage the parents' emotional and they will be easy to get angry and hit the children. Similarly, mother almost hits David because of the depression.

The politic applied by goverment also contributes to child abuse. The goverment decides to create war which causes the recession and great depression so the society gets difficulty in economic and increases stress and emotionally hit children to pour out anger. From the setting of time, it was

invasion to Kuwait in August 1990. American government forced the people to get involved in the war to help Kuwait.

However, religion prevents abuse. It can be seen from the setting of place that is church. When David's family routinely went to church, the family lived happily. By going to church, people will get religious knowledge and warning to avoid bad attitude. On the contrary, when David's family rarely went to church, the family became tenuous. There no intimacy occurs. The husband rarely stayed home while the wife often spent time by drinking and watching TV. Moreover the mother even torture children because she forgot the religion knowledge.

The cultural aspect of American society at that time contributes to child abuse too. American perspective that considers violence as a way to discipline children makes child abuse as a common. In addition, American society have individualistic personality that makes child abuse case increasing from year to year. The child abuse down from generation to generation and will continue because the habit of American society that harbored problems and runs on alcohol. From the plot, it can be seen that David's mother was abusive because she was abused by her mother. She ran to drink and applied her burden to David by abusing him.

The contribution of science and technology to child abuse can be seen from what the characters had and did in the story of Dave Pelzer's trilogy *A Child Called It, The Lost Boy* and *A Man Named Dave*. American technology at the end of twentieth century was developed in some aspects. Because of the appearing of tv, mother often spend her time to watch tv. Therefore, she forgot even ignored the children's needs. The worst thing is that the mother was inspired by an article telling a mother who abused her child. She imitated the way to abuse the child.

The above description shows that the trilogy reflects the social reality that surrounds the author at the time the author wrote his works that is at the end of twentieth century. In addition, through the trilogy, the author conveys his

critique to parents for teaching children with violence and abusing them. He encourages people to bring up their children with love so that they could develop their personality in a positive manner and actualize their potency. The author also criticizes society for bearing the child abuse. He encourages society to be aware on child abuse and help the abused child. Moreover, the author encourages the victims of abuse to survive.



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