

TOPIC: PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLERS DRIVEN BY CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

Mehak Nagpal

St Joseph's University

INTRODUCTION

According to science, the opening of a tale determines its overall tone. As a result, the formative years of childhood are a period of great potential as well as considerable risk.

As young children engage with their surroundings, their minds develop moment by moment. Early encounters have a significant impact on how a child's brain develops and lay the groundwork for future learning, wellbeing, and conduct. A child's early years present a crucial window of opportunity to influence their overall growth and lay the groundwork for their future. Children must have access to health care, proper nourishment, safety and protection from danger, chances for early learning, and responsive caring such as talking, singing, and playing with parents and other loved ones in order to develop to the fullest extent possible, as is their human right. All of this is necessary to feed expanding bodies and nourish developing minds.

We frequently miss this window of chance for many millions of the world's most disadvantaged children, such as those who are disabled, live in poverty, are impacted by war or crises, are on the move, or belong to groups that face discrimination. Millions of children who are growing up in violent, polluted settings and under a lot of stress aren't getting the nourishment or healthcare they need. They lose out on educational chances and lack the stimulation their developing minds require for optimal development. The time, money, and services needed to give their kids the loving care they need in these situations are difficult for their parents and other caregivers to acquire.

Although it has been suggested that childhood and adolescents are carefree periods, children who received a poor upbringing are more likely to experience disorders they are ignorant of and develop a worldview based on the challenges they experienced as children. Children's psychological and social wellbeing may be significantly harmed by neurodevelopmental, emotional, and behavioral disorders that limit brain growth.

Achieving developmental and emotional milestones, acquiring healthy social skills, and learning how to deal with problems are all necessary components of a child's mental health. Children who are mentally healthy tend to enjoy life more and are able to thrive better at home, at school, and in their communities.

Serious deviations from how kids generally learn, behave, or manage their emotions are referred to as mental disorders in children. These deviations create distress and make daily tasks difficult. Many kids frequently suffer anxiety, worry, or act out in disruptive ways. The child may be diagnosed with a mental condition if their symptoms are severe, persistent, and interfere with their ability to perform at play, at home, or at school.

The results of overall health depends on mental well-being. Mental disorders are long-lasting and frequently persistent health issues that might last the entirety of a person's life. Children with mental disorders may experience difficulties at home, in school, and making friends if early diagnosis and treatment are not received. Mental illnesses can also hinder a child's normal growth, which can lead to issues that last into adulthood.

The following categories best describe the most common psychological disorders that affect children and adolescents:

- **Anxiety Disorder**
Excessive or inappropriate fear, along with related behavioral disturbances that interfere with the child's performance, characterize anxiety disorders. A child may be identified with an anxiety condition if their fears and worries don't go away or if they become too intense to enjoy activities at home, school, or during playtime. Some examples of the various worry conditions are:
 - extreme fear when separated from one's parents (separation anxiety)
 - intense dislike to a particular object or circumstance, such as dogs, insects, or heading to the doctor (phobias)
 - being extremely scared of going to school and other locations where people are (social anxiety)
 - being extremely concerned about the future and about negative occurrences taking place (general anxiety)
 - experiencing periodic periods of sudden, unanticipated, intense dread accompanied by symptoms like a racing pulse, difficulty breathing, or a sleepy, trembling, or sweaty sensation (panic disorder)

- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder**
Inattention and disorganization are two characteristics of the neurological condition ADHD. People with ADHD may struggle to focus, regulate impulsive behaviors (acting without considering the consequences), or be excessively active. Despite the fact that ADHD cannot be cured, it can be effectively controlled, and some symptoms may get better as the child gets older.

- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**
A lot of children have bothersome ideas now and then, and they might feel compelled to act on those thoughts, even if what they do doesn't actually make sense. For instance, if they don't wear their favorite item of clothing, they might be concerned about poor luck. Even when they attempt to suppress them or disregard them, some children's thoughts and urges to behave in a certain manner continue. Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) in children is characterized by unwanted thoughts that occur frequently, occupy a significant amount of time, conflict with daily tasks, or cause extreme distress. Obsessions are believed to be the results. The actions are called compulsions.

- **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**
Every child may go through extremely difficult situations that have an impact on their emotions and thinking. Most of the time, children heal swiftly and effectively. However, occasionally children who go through a lot of worry, like from an injury, the passing away or impending death of a close family member or acquaintance, or from violence, will be negatively impacted for a long time. A child might suffer this pain firsthand or see it happen to someone else. Children may be identified with post-traumatic stress disorder when they experience distressing, long-lasting symptoms from such stress that affect their interactions and daily activities.

- **Conduct Disorder**
Children with conduct disorder (CD) exhibit consistent patterns of violence towards others as well as complete disregard for social standards at home, school, and among peers. These rules breaks may constitute criminal offences and lead to imprisonment. Children with CD have a higher risk of injury and may struggle to get along with their classmates.

- **Bipolar Disorder**
Extreme mood fluctuations, including emotional highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression), are symptoms of bipolar illness, formerly known as manic depression.
When you experience depression, you could feel melancholy or hopeless and stop enjoying or being interested in most things. You could experience mania or hypomania, which tends to make you feel

euphoric, energized, or excessively irritated. The capacity to think clearly, energy levels, activity, judgment, and behavior can all be impacted by these mood changes.

Although bipolar disorders are a lifelong diagnosis, by adhering to a treatment plan, you can control your mood swings and other symptoms. Bipolar illness is often treated with pharmaceuticals and psychological therapy (psychotherapy).

- Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a persistent neurological condition. Delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, difficulty in thinking, and a lack of motivation are all possible signs of schizophrenia. The majority of schizophrenia symptoms can significantly improve with therapy, and the risk of a relapse can be reduced. Schizophrenia has no known cure, but research is advancing new, safer therapies.

- Borderline Personality Disorder

An individual's capacity to control their emotions is substantially compromised by borderline personality disorder, a mental condition. This breakdown in emotional regulation may make a person more impulsive, have a negative influence on how they feel about themselves, and damage their relationships with other people. It is possible to manage the symptoms of borderline personality disorder using efficient therapy.

A subgenre of thriller known as the psychological thriller looks at the frequently erratic psychology of its characters. The main concerns of a psychological thriller are the subjects' thoughts and actions. Themes of crime, morality, mental illness, substance abuse, numerous worlds or a deteriorating sense of reality and unreliable narrators are all common in psychological thrillers which also frequently feature aspects of mystery.

I particularly enjoy psychological thrillers because they dive into the motivations and innermost thoughts of the characters, allowing us to consider how their actions drive the storyline to the outer limits of morality and ethics. The genre makes us reflect on our own and other people's darkness.

Since movies are more appealing than books or essays, I did a thorough examination of the 2022 remake film "Goodnight Mommy," which is an Austrian German psychological thriller directed by Matt Sobel, in order to convey the significance of childhood.

SYNOPSIS

As the movie begins, little twin boys Elias and Lukas (Cameron Crovetti and Nicholas Crovetti) are being left off by their father in the secluded country house owned by their mother (Naomi Watts), reportedly for the first time in a while. It comes out that their mother had some sort of medical operation done in secret since her head was entirely wrapped in bandages. That alone is unsettling, but as the kids get used to her, they start to notice other things that are off: she is quick to get angry, she now appears to be a smoker, she won't sing the song for them at bedtime, and she won't let them go into the barn in the backyard. Strangest of all, she barely acknowledges Lukas even exists and seems to be focusing most of her time on Elias.

In spite of the fact that it is the midst of summer, the mother makes the twins cover the blinds during the day, enforces a tight rule of silence inside, and only permits them to play outside. The boys say that their mother would never respond cruelly or physically lash out at Elias when he exhibits mischievous or rebellious behavior. On account of these unusual circumstances, the boys are able to presume that their mother may not be the same person she appears to be and could instead be an impostor who has harmed their mother. Their suspicions are shown to be correct when they discover an old image of the mother and another unidentified woman wearing the same outfits and having corresponding physical attributes.

Elias and Lucas ultimately went to the barn despite their mother's will. They see an unsettling stain near the barn that appears to be blood. When caught, their mother physically abuses Elias. The boys tend to seek assistance from their father as a result of their mother's increasingly erratic behavior. However, they are unable to reach their father but when their mother learns of this, she breaches the lock on their room and disposes of their cell phone. However, the

boys managed to flee from there and sprinted out in the middle of a stormy night in search of protection. When two police officers find them hiding in an abandoned home and take them back to their mother.

When that doesn't succeed, they are determined to persuade the supposed intruder to declare that she is a fraudulent and disclose the location of their mother. She continues to assert that she is indeed their mother despite having duct tape applied to her body and being drenched with freezing water. Lukas claims that the woman is lying and advises Elias that they should leave the house. Elias is divided between his concerns about her identity and the extent he is ready to go to in order to prove it, while Lukas is still adamant that she is not who she claims to be. The mother tries to convince Elias to ignore his brother and focus entirely on what he wants to do. Later, Elias comes to the conclusion that Lukas has been influencing his viewpoint.

He releases his mother and loses track of Lukas as a result. He is taken to the barn by his mother, who then admits to him the truth—that he accidentally shot his brother Lukas while they were playing with a gun. Lukas is only a creation of his imagination; he doesn't actually exist. His mother compels him into looking at the spot. In order for him to see the gunfire, she holds the lamp. Elias requests his mother to stop at this point since it is difficult for him to think about the trauma again. By mistake pushing his mother, she tumbles and becomes unconscious. Before Elias can save her, the barn burns down due to a fire that started in the hay. He watches as the barn burns to the ground as he flees to safety outdoors.

Elias begins to see Lukas again as he watches the barn burn, and this time besides Lukas he also sees his mother.

PSYCHOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Beginning with Watts' portrayal of the mother, we learn that Elias is having hallucinations of Lukas. The mother is heard stating, "That's the problem," in a scenario when Elias overheard a conversation between his mother and an unidentified individual. He is always with Lukas. She continues by saying that she doesn't believe she can stay in the house for "another second" before asserting that she needs to put a stop to it and that she needs him to go. Watts even asks how long she needs to continue being fake.

The mother also made reference to the barn, where Lukas had died the winter before. Elias slipped in even though she had instructed him not to return there and was subsequently discovered. Even then, there was no discussion of Lukas' passing. The film's efforts to stir up mystery around a child's mental state highlight the consequences of such unregulated circumstances.

Hallucinations result from unresolved trauma that becomes deeply ingrained in a person's mind. In the movie *Goodnight Mommy*, Elias struggles to accept the truth of Lukas' passing. That distinction between truth and imagination has disappeared, as his mother accurately stated in one of the situations.

Elias seemed to be stuck in a fantasy universe where Lukas now has the reins. Because of this, when his mother forced Elias to confront reality in the barn, he not only broke down but also accidentally killed his mother in a short fit of wrath.

The shame and anguish that had followed by the death of Lukas led to Elias having hallucinations. He created a universe where his brother continued to live as a method to cope with the tragedy that had occurred and the loneliness that he experienced.

The trauma also explained his mother's previous actions in the film. Because of her personal sorrow, she was detached from her son, which most likely led to resentment against Elias for accidentally murdering his sibling.

Elias' subconscious gives priority to the hallucinating pictures of Lukas and his mother that appeared before him immediately after he fled the barn, despite having witnessed the barn burn with his mother inside.

At the end of the movie, it is seen that a hand extends to Elias as he tears at his mother's passing in the last scene of *Goodnight Mommy*. He recognizes his mother and Lukas as they stand by his side. We, the viewers, are informed that Elias's hallucinations have returned and that the cycle will continue for him. Elias' future is unknown because no one is around to inform him of the truth or to distinguish between his fantasies and reality at this time.

This is a classic instance of dissociative identity disorder (DID). The mental illness dissociative identity disorder (DID) affects many people. DID patients have two or more distinct identities. At certain times, these personalities are in charge of their behaviors. Every identity has a unique personal history, character characteristics, and preferences. Memory lapses and hallucinations—the belief of something being real when it is actually not—can be caused by DID. Multiple personality disorder or split personality disorder were previous names for dissociative identity disorder. One of several dissociative illnesses is DID. These conditions impair a person's capacity to relate to reality.

Typically, childhood sexual or physical trauma leads to DID. It can also appear after a war or other stressful occurrences, such as a natural disaster. A person may use the condition as a means of separating oneself from the traumatic event. Delusions, anxiety, memory loss, disorientation, and depression are just a few of the common indications and symptoms of DID.

Elias had dissociative identity disorder, which explains why he believed his brother Lukas was still alive. He also has Capgras delusion, a syndrome in which one twin is unable to accept the death of their brother. Since Lukas's passing, he had been experiencing hallucinations of him, and although his mother had tried to help him gradually return to normalcy, the dissociative identity disorder proved to be too much for him.

This also explains why the mother of the twins changed so much as a parent. The Capgras syndrome refers to the perception that close friends and previously familiar faces are somehow replaced and no longer truly who they once were.

The Capgras delusion is a frightening narrative device that may be employed for a variety of purposes. In *Goodnight Mommy*, it is used to depict the melancholy distance and uncertainty that develops between parents and their ageing children as well as between those who have experienced trauma. Elias and Lukas don't yet comprehend how a parent may turn cold, harsh, and cruel, like many children who haven't reached adulthood, so it makes more sense to think that there's an impostor under the bandages. But maybe they're right when she smashes their phone in the garbage disposal and breaks through their door with a crowbar.

CONCLUSION

As we come to a conclusion, the film “*Goodnight Mommy*” is a fantastic illustration of the significance of mental health, attention and care given to children during their childhood and adolescence, as well as especially when the child is going through trauma or challenges. Parental involvement is crucial for a child's growth. Even the smallest boredom or trouble can have a significant impact on how a child views the world as they get older.

Parents can take a variety of actions to ensure that their child's development proceeds smoothly, including establishing strong bonds with them, surrounding them with supportive family and friends, and, if necessary, attending child development support groups.

The importance of early childhood development programs should not be understated by parents. Attending ECD programs has been shown to have significant positive effects by research. In addition to improved academic performance, these kids also exhibit better social behavior and more stable emotional states. They also form closer bonds with their parents. Overall, early childhood development is considered as a crucial topic that requires more attention. The early years of a child's life are vital, and every parent should recognize this.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

1. The impact and long- term effect of childhood trauma

The article talks about early childhood trauma and the detrimental long-term effects that may result in an everlasting psychological and physical issues. Early childhood trauma, can result in neurobiological abnormalities that have a profound influence on human development and alter brain function. Cognitive and physical functioning are caused by these modifications to the brain's structural organization. According to scientific evidence, childhood trauma is linked to physical, psychological, and emotional problems that can last into adulthood. The research help investigate the neurological, physiological, and psychological

effects of trauma exposure. The importance of recognizing coping mechanisms, examining perseverance, and identifying scientifically proven methods of therapy to help reduce symptoms of trauma

2. Early family environments and traumatic experiences associated with borderline personality disorder

A questionnaire was used to gather information from a group of depressed female inpatients; 17 had been diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD), and 19 did not receive diagnosis. Childhood trauma experiences included physical and sexual assault, witnessing violence, premature separation experiences, and family environment attributes. Individuals with BPD reported experiences of sexual abuse, physical abuse, and witnessing violence at a significantly higher rate than those without any diagnosis. Even after controlling for physical abuse, subjective sadness score, diagnostic differences between groups, and familial environment, sexual abuse remained the only trauma variable that significantly predicted dimensional BPD score. Despite the fact that the BPD families were said to stand out for a number of unique home environment traits, the control dimension still strongly predicted the dimensional borderline score even when sexual abuse was taken into account. These findings imply that additional research on sexual abuse and the whole family context is necessary to fully understand the symptoms of BPD.

