



TORI SPRING'S DEPRESSION IN ALICE OSEMAN'S *SOLITAIRE*

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Abstract, This study aims to analyse the symptoms, causes, and effects of depression experienced by the main character, Tori Spring, in *Solitaire*, a novel written by Alice Oseman. The research uses a descriptive qualitative method and applies Aaron T. Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression as the theoretical framework. The findings reveal that Tori shows several symptoms of depression, including insomnia, anhedonia, low self-esteem, self-blame, suicidal ideation, and appetite loss. These causes are triggered by various internal and external factors, such as repeated failures, lack of emotional support, family conflict, social rejection, and excessive guilt. The effects of Tori's depression significantly impact her behaviour, thought patterns, and relationships with others. This study concludes that *Solitaire* presents a realistic portrayal of adolescent depression and emphasizes the importance of emotional understanding and mental health awareness. The analysis also highlights how literature can reflect complex psychological experiences, making it a valuable medium for exploring mental health issues.

Keywords: Causes of depression, Effects of depression, Symptoms of depression

INTRODUCTION

Depression often presents itself as a complex emotional condition, stemming from both inner distress and environmental influences. Depression is not just a momentary feeling of sadness, but an ongoing psychological state that can interfere with a person's emotional well-being, way of thinking, and even daily activities. As stated by Johnson (2018), depression is a feeling of deep sorrow that often stems from great disappointment, and if not treated appropriately, can push a person towards social isolation to the desire to end life. In a psychological context, symptoms of depression can take many forms, from sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, low self-esteem, to excessive self-blame. Aaron T. Beck, an important figure in cognitive therapy, explains that depression arises from negative thought patterns that have been embedded in an individual's cognitive schema, where a person sees himself as worthless, his environment as threatening, and his future as bleak (Beck & Alford, 2009).

In literary studies, psychological conditions such as depression are an important topic that is often explored through characters that reflect these emotional struggles. Literature, as explained by Wellek and Warren (1963), is a reflection of human life and experience, thus indirectly providing deep insight into a person's psychological and emotional condition. Through a literary psychology approach, readers can delve into the inner conflicts and emotional wounds experienced by characters in works of fiction, while understanding that these stories reflect the reality that exists in society. Thus, novels are not just fictional stories, but a place to voice inner struggles that are often unspoken.

One literary work that explores the theme of depression in depth is *Solitaire*, a novel by Alice Oseman that tells the story of Tori Spring, a teenage girl who is quiet and introverted, and has mental health problems. Tori is not the main character who is portrayed as strong or energetic. Instead, she is a teenage girl who is full of doubts, tends to avoid social life, and is trapped in a heavy inner struggle. The story's setting in an English high school shows how Tori deals with academic pressures, friendship dynamics, and a lack of emotional support from her family. Through her interactions with Michael Holden, a cheerful and inquisitive new student, Tori is slowly drawn into conversations and experiences that force her to face the reality of her life and mental state. However, even this relationship is not enough to keep her from insomnia, loss of interest in social activities, and the desire to end her life.

The author's interest in this theme is inseparable from the fact that depression in adolescents is a real problem, yet it is often ignored or misunderstood. Many cases of depression go undetected because they are considered a normal part of the adolescent phase, even though the symptoms can have serious consequences. Therefore, through a literary psychology study of the character Tori Spring in the novel *Solitaire*, this research aims to identify the symptoms, causes, and effects of her depression using Aaron T. Beck's theory as the main analytical framework. This research is expected to not only add insight into literary studies, but also increase readers' awareness of the importance of emotional understanding and mental health, especially among adolescents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Depression is a common psychological disorder that has been widely examined both in psychological studies and in literary analysis. Aaron T. Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression provides a fundamental framework for understanding the cognitive distortions experienced by individuals suffering from depression. According to Beck (1976), depression arises from negative automatic thoughts and cognitive schemas, which lead individuals to interpret life experiences through a pessimistic lens. This perspective is known as the cognitive triad: negative views of the self, the world, and the future.

Previous studies have analyzed depressive symptoms in literary characters. Rahmadi (2020) explored the depression of Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath,

highlighting how environmental stress and personal trauma shaped her psychological state. Similarly, Retno Wati (2013) examined Bella Swan's depression in *New Moon*, identifying emotional loss and rejection as primary triggers, though her study did not detail the psychological symptoms. Febrianti (2020) analyzed *Me Before You* and identified emotional withdrawal and suicidal ideation as central signs of the character's depression. These studies emphasized either the causes or effects, while this study combines symptoms, causes, and consequences using Beck's theory comprehensively. Beck (2009) categorizes the symptoms of depression into four areas: emotional (e.g., persistent sadness, hopelessness), cognitive (e.g., low self-esteem, self-blame), motivational (e.g., lack of drive, suicidal ideation), and physical (e.g., insomnia, appetite loss). Depression is often triggered by stress, rejection, or unresolved trauma, especially in adolescence. Literary works, as reflections of human experience, often portray these symptoms through character development.

In the novel *Solitaire* by Alice Oseman, the main character, Tori Spring, displays various symptoms of depression that align with Beck's framework. Her story represents how depression manifests through emotional isolation, cognitive distortions, lack of motivation, and physical withdrawal. Analyzing her character through the lens of cognitive theory allows a deeper understanding of how literature can depict mental health issues authentically and meaningfully.

METHOD

This research applied an extrinsic approach, particularly a psychological literary analysis, to examine the external factors influencing the main character's mental condition in Alice Oseman's *Solitaire*. According to Wellek and Warren (1949: 65–66), an extrinsic approach considers aspects outside the text itself, including psychology, history, and social context. In this study, the researcher used Aaron T. Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression as the theoretical foundation, which focuses on the negative thoughts and schemas that influence an individual's emotions and behavior.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. As Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 7–8) assert, qualitative research aims to produce detailed narrative data to explore human behavior and emotional experiences. Furthermore, Bogdan and Biklen (1992: 5) emphasize that qualitative research is descriptive in nature, where data are gathered in the form of words and statements rather than numeric values. In this research, the data were obtained from selected quotations in the novel *Solitaire* that reflect Tori Spring's symptoms, causes, and effects of depression. The main data source is Alice Oseman's novel *Solitaire*, first published in 2015, while additional references include psychological theories and previous studies related to depression and mental health.

The research instrument was the researcher herself, who conducted a deep reading of the text, identified relevant psychological elements, and connected them with the chosen theory. The data collection involved reading the novel thoroughly, marking and classifying important textual evidence, and selecting data that supported the analysis of

Tori Spring's depression. The data analysis process included interpreting the selected quotations using Beck's theory, identifying patterns of depressive symptoms, and drawing conclusions based on the cognitive and emotional patterns observed in the main character's behavior.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Tori Spring's Depression in *Solitaire* by Alice Oseman

Tori Spring is the main character in Alice Oseman's novel *Solitaire*, portrayed as a teenager who struggles with mental health issues, particularly depression. Throughout the story, Tori is depicted as someone who constantly grapples with despair, emptiness, and the inability to emotionally connect with others. Her emotional journey shows how intense internal pressure and persistent negative thinking can lead to deep psychological collapse.

Tori's depression does not arise suddenly but is the result of a combination of traumatic experiences, social pressure, and the lack of a strong support system. She feels that the world around her is unable to comprehend her thoughts, and even she herself does not know how to cope with the emotional turmoil that continues to haunt her. In such a state, Tori chooses to withdraw, build emotional walls, and live each day with a draining sense of apathy.

The symptoms and causes of Tori's depression can be analyzed through Aaron T. Beck's theory of cognitive distortions, which explains that individuals experiencing depression tend to hold negative views about themselves, the world, and the future (the cognitive triad).

At the beginning of the narrative, Tori expresses a desire to disappear or die young, which indicates suicidal ideation. This reflects a loss of hope in the future, one of the components in Beck's cognitive triad. This is reflected in the following quotation:

"My name is Victoria Spring. I think you should know that I make up a lot of stuff in my head and then get sad about it. I like to sleep and I like to blog. I'm going to die someday and Sometimes I think I'm just going to disappear." (Oseman, 2015:1).

2. The Causes of Tori Spring's Depression in *Solitaire* by Alice Oseman

Tori Spring's depression stems from a combination of internal psychological conflict and external environmental pressures. According to Aaron T. Beck's cognitive theory, depression often arises when a person develops distorted thought patterns, especially as a response to perceived failure, loss, or helplessness. In Tori's case, her internal turmoil is intensified by unresolved guilt, isolation, and the absence of meaningful emotional support. These elements interact and reinforce each other, contributing to the persistence and severity of her depression.

a. Internal Causes of Tori Spring's Depression

The internal causes that trigger Tori's depression come from within herself, such as feelings of failure, negative self-perception, and constant emotional burden. These symptoms are reflected in her thoughts and behaviors, which indicate a loss of motivation and purpose in life. Tori believes that all her efforts will inevitably end in failure. She holds low expectations for herself and doubts her ability to succeed. *This is evident in the following quotation:*

“What’s the point? I’ll just mess it up like everything else. I always do. It doesn’t matter how hard I try it’s like I’m destined to ruin everything. So really, there’s no point in even starting.” (Oseman, 2015:129).

When she receives poor exam results, Tori admits she expected to fail, yet she still feels disappointed. This reaction suggests a dissonance between her internalized hopelessness and a residual desire for achievement or self-worth. It implies that even though she has trained herself to expect failure, there remains a part of her that hopes for a different outcome—highlighting the painful tension that often exists in the minds of individuals experiencing depression. This moment captures how deep-rooted patterns of negative thinking continue to persist despite conflicting emotional responses. This is evident in the following quotation:

“I failed four of my January exams. I don’t really know how I managed to do that. I didn’t even think I cared, but when I saw the results, I don’t know, it was like I already expected to fail, and somehow, I still felt disappointed.” (Oseman, 2015:43).

Tori also experiences excessive guilt regarding her brother Charlie’s condition. She feels responsible for his suffering, even though the reality is more complex. This overwhelming sense of guilt reflects the cognitive distortion known as personalization, in which individuals blame themselves for events outside of their control. In Tori’s mind, she internalizes Charlie’s struggles as a direct consequence of her own failure as a sister, believing she should have done more to protect or support him. This misplaced sense of accountability further fuels her depressive thinking, reinforcing feelings of inadequacy and helplessness. This is evident in the following quotation:

“It’s my fault he’s like this. I shouldn’t leave him alone.” (Oseman, 2015:141).

b. External Causes of Tori Spring’s Depression

External factors in Tori’s life—such as her family, school environment, and friendships—also contribute significantly to her depressive state. These influences often act as constant stressors that exacerbate her feelings of loneliness and helplessness. While Tori’s internal thoughts are shaped by negative self-perception, her external reality fails to offer the emotional support and stability she needs to counterbalance her mental struggles. Instead, the lack of communication within her family, the emotional distance from peers, and the dismissive responses to her behavior contribute to a sense of alienation that reinforces her depressive mindset. The accumulation of these external pressures makes it difficult for

Tori to find relief or validation, deepening her isolation and intensifying her emotional pain.

b.1 Family Conflict and Emotional Disconnection

A distant and emotionally detached family relationship is one of the major external causes that worsen Tori's psychological condition. She feels alienated in her own home and lacks the emotional warmth that should be the foundation of adolescent development. In such situations, poor communication and emotional neglect lead individuals like Tori to feel worthless and sink deeper into loneliness and isolation. One of the most impactful external factors is Tori's emotionally distant relationship with her parents. They focus only on what is physically visible and fail to recognize her internal emotional struggles. Yet, emotional support from family is crucial for teenagers to face life pressures and emotional instability. Tori feels her parents are unaware of her emotional state. They assume she is fine simply because she occasionally smiles and does not exhibit extreme physical symptoms. *This is evident in the following quotation:*

“My parents don't notice anything. They never have. They think I'm fine. Because I smile sometimes. Because I'm not starving myself or cutting myself or lying in bed all day.” (Oseman, 2015:111–112).

In addition, Tori experiences tension in daily family interactions. Dinner, which should be a moment of connection, becomes filled with silence and emotional disengagement. *This is evident in the following quotation:*

“We sit at dinner in silence. No one says anything. We just eat... Mum gets up halfway through and answers the phone. Dad scrolls on his iPad.” (Oseman, 2015:89).

b.2 Charlie's Condition and Emotional Burden

Charlie's deteriorating mental health makes Tori feel as though she has lost the only close family member she could relate to. This emotional distance from Charlie, who once provided comfort and companionship, creates a void in Tori's life that is difficult to fill. As his condition worsens, Tori mourns not just the changes in Charlie, but also the loss of shared experiences that once made her feel connected and understood. She longs for the times they used to laugh, talk, and enjoy each other's company—a period that now feels distant and unreachable, intensifying her feelings of grief and isolation. *This is evident in the following quotation:*

“He's not really Charlie anymore... Now it's like I've lost him. And I can't get him back.” (Oseman, 2015:141).

b.3 Lack of Support from School and Friends

Tori feels that no one truly understands her, even at school. Her sadness is seen as exaggerated by her peers, who label her as dramatic and undeserving of empathy. *This is evident in the following quotation:*

“You act like you’re so deep and miserable, but really, you’re just a selfish bitch. You think the world revolves around your sadness, Tori. But it doesn’t.” (Oseman, 2015:167).

She also indicates that she has no outlet to express her emotions openly, even with those around her. *This is evident in the following quotation:*

“No one I know in real life knows about my blog.” (Oseman, 2015:55).

3. The Effects of Tori Spring’s Depression in *Solitaire* by Alice Oseman

Tori’s depression not only affects her emotions but also influences her actions and the way she interacts with others. The following are the effects of depression on her life.

a. The Psychological Effects of Tori’s Depression

Tori exhibits a tendency to excessively blame herself, especially concerning her brother’s condition. She feels responsible for the suffering of others, internalizing their pain as if it were caused by her own actions or inactions. This overwhelming self-blame extends beyond her relationship with Charlie and reflects a broader pattern in her thought processes—where she assumes accountability for situations outside her control. Such a mindset not only deepens her sense of guilt but also reinforces the feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy commonly experienced by individuals suffering from depression. This is evident in the following quotation:

“I instantly wish I’d just shut up. I always do this thing where I accidentally say self-deprecating stuff that makes other people feel really awkward, especially when it’s true.” “it’s my fault he’s like this. I shouldn’t leave him alone.” (Oseman, 2015:141)

She also displays low self-esteem. Tori believes she is not worthy of socializing or being heard. This negative self-perception contributes to her social withdrawal, as she often convinces herself that her presence is a burden or that her thoughts are unimportant. Her internalized belief that she lacks value or significance prevents her from expressing herself or building meaningful connections with others. This self-deprecating mindset deepens her isolation and perpetuates the cycle of depressive thought patterns. This is demonstrated in the following quotation:

“He smiles at me like I’m joking, but I’m not joking. All parties are boring. “ You can go and talk to other people, you know,” I say. “ I really don’t have anything interesting to say.” “ You always have interesting to say, “he says. “ You don’t just say them.” (Oseman, 2015:56).

a. The Physical and Behavioral Effects of Tori’s Depression

The effects of depression on Tori are not limited to psychological aspects but also impact her physical condition and daily behavior. She shows typical symptoms such as loss of interest in social activities, disrupted sleep and eating patterns, and withdrawal from her surroundings. This depression renders her unable to carry out normal daily routines. Activities that once felt ordinary now become mentally exhausting and

burdensome. This shows how depression can weaken basic human functions and significantly impact one's quality of life. Tori loses interest in various social activities. She feels bored in crowds and prefers to be alone. *This is evident in the following quotation:*

“All parties are boring... I really don't have anything interesting to say.” (Oseman, 2015:56).

She also experiences sleep disturbances and reduced appetite, and lacks motivation to carry out basic daily tasks. These physical symptoms further illustrate how depression affects more than just emotional well-being—it also impairs the body's ability to function normally. Tori finds it difficult to summon the energy to get out of bed or nourish herself, even when she recognizes the need to do so. Simple activities that others take for granted become insurmountable challenges for her, showing how depression strips away both motivation and vitality. This is evident in the following quotation:

“I don't get out of bed even though I'm hungry, accepting the fact that my unwillingness to get up will probably result in my death from starvation. Then I realize that I can't possibly let my parents have two children who knowingly starve themselves. Oh god, dilemma. Even lying bed is stressful. (Oseman, 2015:70).

The desire to disappear and thoughts of death also emerge as long-term effects of her depression. These thoughts are not fleeting but rather persistent reflections of her overwhelming emotional pain and hopelessness. Tori frequently contemplates vanishing or dying as a form of escape from the emptiness she feels. This mental state indicates a deep despair where life seems unbearable, and death appears to be the only way out. Such ideation aligns with the cognitive distortions that characterize severe depression, in which individuals believe they are a burden or that their existence has no meaning. *This is reflected in the following quotation:*

“I walked to the bridge and looked over the edge and thought... maybe.” (Oseman, 2015:175).

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the symptoms, causes, and effects of depression experienced by Tori Spring, the main character in Solitaire by Alice Oseman. Using Aaron T. Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression, it is found that Tori exhibits various symptoms including insomnia, loss of interest in social activities (anhedonia), suicidal ideation, self-blame, and decreased appetite. These symptoms are consistently reflected in her thoughts, behaviors, and interactions throughout the novel.

The analysis shows that the causes of Tori's depression include repeated failures in academic and social settings, the perceived loss of a significant figure (her brother Charlie), lack of emotional support from both family and peers, exposure to frequent criticism and humiliation, experiences of bullying and social rejection, family conflict, and excessive guilt or feelings of responsibility. These experiences shape Tori's

cognitive distortions, leading her to develop negative beliefs about herself, others, and the future—consistent with Beck's cognitive triad.

Furthermore, the effects of her depression are shown through her withdrawal from social life, cognitive impairments such as inability to make decisions, lack of motivation, suicidal thoughts, and low self-worth. Through literary analysis, the novel presents a deeply realistic portrayal of adolescent depression and emphasizes the importance of emotional awareness, social support, and psychological resilience.

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