

Family Dysfunction as Reflected in Kei Sanbe's Anime *Erased*

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Abstract. To reflect the social reality, literature often describes different social issues, including family dysfunction. Family dysfunction can lead to psychological and emotional impacts on individuals, especially children who can affect their social development and interaction. This study is to discover how the family dysfunction is reflected in the relationship between Kayo Hinazuki and his mother in Kei Sanbe *Erased*. This qualitative literary research uses a literary sociological approach. Data was collected through speeches, acts, and events from the anime. The analysis shows that the disturbing relationship between Kayo and his mother manifests itself with physical violence, emotional negligence and social isolation, illustrating the broader social failures in terms of child protection. This research is related because it emphasizes the importance of early intervention in the case of mistreatment and negligence for children, especially in family structure. Methodically, research and application of close reading techniques, focusing on narrative analysis and character research. The main conclusions show that *Erased* describes in a practical way of not being resolved and the indifference of the system maintains violent cycles and emotional deprivation in families. Previous studies on *Erased* mainly focused on his horror plot and his time travel elements; However, this study added a new contribution by focusing on representing the family dysfunction, thus enriching the understanding of the anime's social comments.

Keywords: Family Dysfunction, Child Abuse, Sociology of Literature, Anime, *Erased*.

1 Introduction

Literary works are artistic creations that convey morals, principles, and messages that are pertinent to both social and personal aspects of human existence. Literary works can be divided into three categories: epic, lyric, and drama[1]. Drama is a genre of literature that consists of a sequence of narratives about human existence during a specific time period that are told through movement, sound, and rhythm. Drama can be portrayed on stage, film, or television[2]. Film is an artistic medium that uses sound, visuals, and other filmmaking techniques to tell stories and convey messages[3]. As a result, the film *Erased* serves as both a critique and a commentary on entertainment and social reality.

Through film, the audience is invited to receive data, facts, views and thoughts in the reality packaging of a film. However, the reality represented in the film is a reality that has been previously constructed using a certain style. Construction of the reality depicted in the movie is naturally more or less based on the reality which actually occurs in society[4].

The social realities associated with the depiction of dysfunctional families in fictional narratives, such as the anime *Erased*, are not only for dramatic effect, but also serve as a reflection of real social issues that are often not discussed.

An individual's life is profoundly affected by the conditions of the family to which they belong. Children's behavior with others can often be attributed to the individuals they frequently interact with[5]. A dysfunctional family is exposed to abusive behaviors and tends to overlook the roles of its members. In such families, problems and conflicts may give rise to inappropriate behaviors, and members might fail to fulfill their roles effectively[5]. Conflicts and tensions often exist between children and parents in these families, which can negatively impact family relationships and the emotional well-being of its members[5].

The Kayo family case shows how unaddressed past trauma can transform into new forms of violence against children. Family is the main key in the stage of the emotional and mental development of the child[6]. The family dysfunction that occurred in the Kayo family case resulted in negative emotional and mental development for the children, Kayo itself.

Kayo Miyazaki's portrait of family dysfunction in the form of emotional and mental neglect of children and domestic violence is a reflection of current social reality. Domestic violence itself is still a serious problem in Indonesia. Records from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, show that in 2024, there were a total of 28,789 cases of violence[7]. From the description above, what is of interest to researchers in researching the *Erased* anime is that the portrait of family dysfunction represented in this anime is a social problem that often occurs in people's lives, and we as part of society must be able to see how this pattern of family dysfunction occurs and what its effects are.

Studies on family dysfunction have been conducted in the context of psychology and sociology. For example, research by Fitzgerald, London-Johnson, and Gallus (2020) suggests that trauma experienced by parents can impact their children's behaviour and emotional problems, through mechanisms such as harsh parenting and negative couple relationship quality. However, these studies have generally focused on real populations and not many have explored how these concepts are represented in popular media, particularly anime.

In the context of anime, *Erased* presents a complex narrative of family dysfunction and inter-generational trauma through the characters of Kayo Hinazuki and her mother, Akemi Hinazuki. Although some fan reviews and discussions have alluded to this aspect, as discussed in the article by Lynlynays (2016), who notes that the domestic violence Kayo experiences is a chain reaction of her own mother's abuse.

2 Methods

Two methods are used in this research: visual study, which involves closely watching the movie and taking notes on significant information related to the study; and literature study, which involves gathering and examining a variety of pertinent theoretical sources to bolster the conceptual foundation of the research and support visual data analysis. A literary sociological theory is used to examine the dysfunctional family dynamics in the anime *Erased*. The sociological theory of literature arises from the view that literature is a social institution that uses language as the main source and reflection of the social life of a society. Literature reflects life and social reality as well as the world of human subjectivity. This makes literature an image of life that always presents social reality[8]. Therefore, the sociology of literature theory is suitable as an approach to examine the anime *Erased* in order to reveal the phenomenon of family dysfunction reflected in the storyline.

3 Result and Discussion

The effects of family dysfunction are expertly illustrated in the anime *Erased* through the character of Kayo Hinazuki. Several key scenes demonstrate how Kayo's emotional and social development was impacted by the abuse and neglect she experienced.

3.1 The Kayo Family's Representations of Physical and Psychological Abuse

Kayo's mother, Akemi Hinazuki, has physically abused her, as evidenced by the obvious bruises she has. She also experiences psychological abuse in the form of hostility, control, and emotional neglect. Kayo struggles to communicate or trust people in this setting, which makes her socially isolated and withdrawn.

Physical Abuse



Fig. 1. Illustration where Satoru sees the bruises on Kayo's body, implies that Kayo is a victim of violence.

Satoru: 確か母親と二人暮らし。えー、打撲？

Satoru: She lived with her mother, if my memory serves. Huh? A blunt force trauma?

As Satoru observes the bruises on Kayo's body, which validate the indications of abuse she experiences at home, the dialogue demonstrates his mounting mistrust and anxiety.

Psychological Abuse

The effects of domestic violence on children, particularly when it takes the form of psychological violence, which includes acts of humiliation, harsh language, and mockery[9]. Children who have experienced psychological abuse frequently have a propensity to withdraw from the social interactions that take place around them.



Fig. 2. Illustration that showing Kayo Hinazuki's feelings of self-isolation.

Kayo Hinazuki: 私だけがいない町、ひな好きかよ。今よりもっと大きくなって、一人でどこへ行けるようになったら、遠い国へ行け見たい。遠い島に行ってみたい。誰もいない島に行ってみたい。島には、大人も、子供も、クラスメートも、先生も、お母さんもない。

Kayo Hinazuki: The town where there is no one but me, Kayo Hinazuki. When I grow up, when I can go anywhere by myself, I want to go to a faraway country. I want to go to a faraway island. I want to go to an island where no one is. No adults, no children, no classmates, no teachers, no mothers.

Kayo, who have experienced psychological abuse from her mother, have a propensity to withdraw from the social interactions that take place around them. She wrote about her feeling in her diary, which Satoru later read.

3.2 Unresolved Trauma is The Root Cause.

Akemi, Kayo mother's, as a former victim of domestic abuse, Akemi's unresolved trauma is the root cause of Kayo's family's dysfunction. After her divorce, Akemi battled the strain of raising a child by herself and emotional stress.



Fig. 3. Illustration that showing Akemi as a former victim of domestic abuse and her unresolved trauma that cause family's dysfunction.

This flashback depicts Akemi's life following her divorce. Being a single mother puts emotional strain on her, and she struggles to deal with the trauma she experienced from domestic abuse. This illustrates a generational cycle of abuse as her unresolved pain becomes anger directed at Kayo

3.3 The Social Reaction to the Dysfunction of the Kayo Family

Peer Stigmatization

Because of her quiet and reclusive personality, Kayo is frequently shunned by her peers and perceived as odd. Her social isolation and sense of worthlessness are exacerbated by her peers' lack of empathy and understanding.



Fig. 4. Illustration of peers accusing Kayo of being a thief.

Classmate :なくしたんじゃないくて、盗まれたのだと思う。ひな好きさんが怪しいと思います。

Satoru :お前！何を困窮に？

Classmate :だって張らず起算給食食べるのにお金払ってないし。

Classmate : I don't think he lose it. Somebody must've stolen it. Like Hanazuki-san, maybe.

Satoru :Wait. What makes you say that?!

Classmate : I mean, she hasn't paid for her lunches.

Kayo's classmates accused her of stealing lunch money because she was from a low-income family. This accusation illustrates how peers may stigmatize and discriminate against children from dysfunctional family.

Support from Caring People

Despite the general lack of interest from peers and adults, some people, like Satoru and Sachiko, his mother, express sincere concern.



Fig.5. Illustration that showing warmth and care from Satoru and his mother have for Kayo.

Sachiko : 佳代ちゃん！髪を洗った上げようか？

Kayo Hinazuki : え？自分でできるから

Sachiko : いいから、いいから。お客さん、痒いところありませんか？（あはは）
これですか？それとも。。。こちょこちょ！

Sachiko : Want me to wash your hair, Kayo-chan?

Kayo Hinazuki : Eh? I can do it myself.

Sachiko : It's okay, it's okay. Do you have an itch, customer? (Laugh together) Is it this one?
Or... here? (Tickle tickle!)

Kayo had never felt such warmth and care before, not even in her own home, but Satoru's mother's and Satoru's affection brought her to tears. This contrast emphasizes how crucial a supportive social environment is to ending the cycle of dysfunctional families and providing a safe haven for victims.

4 Conclusion

According to the analysis that was done, family dysfunction is portrayed in *Erased* as the result of unresolved trauma and insufficient social response. The anime emphasizes the severe effects of abuse and neglect in the family setting through Kayo Hinazuki's character. It also emphasizes the vital role that compassionate people play in offering protection and ending the cycle of violence that occurs between generations.

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