

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Of Study

Anxiety is a mental health issue affecting many people of various ages. Excessive fear, anxious feelings, or avoidance of perceived threats in an environment or oneself are the characteristics of an anxiety disorder (Craske & Stein, 2016). These symptoms of anxiety can interfere with the daily life of the sufferer. Anxiety disorder can affect anyone regardless of their age, gender, or backgrounds. They are prevalent mental disorders experienced by many people around the world. World Health Organization (WHO) reported that approximately 4% of the population suffers from anxiety disorder. In 2019 itself, a total of 301 million people in the world experienced anxiety disorder (World Health Organization: WHO, 2023). In a systematic review, Baxter et al. (2012) showed that one in every 14 people suffers from anxiety disorder. Additionally, the study also reported that women are more likely to have anxiety disorders compared to men.

Anxiety disorders are generally classified into several different types. World Health Organization categorised anxiety disorders into seven types, namely Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD), Panic Disorder, Agoraphobia, Separation Anxiety Disorder, Specific phobias, and Selective Mutism. Anxiety can occur due to many factors. However, the anxiety that occurs due to a person's internal conflict is known as neurotic anxiety. Neurotic anxiety is distinctively different from general or objective anxiety. While

anxiety occurs as a response to an actual threat, neurotic anxiety stems from excessive internal insecurities. It is associated with the unconscious desires and drives of an individual (Corey, 2013). This type of anxiety may be factored from traumatic early life experiences, such as mistreatment from family members during childhood. Excessive worry and irrational fears that stem from internal insecurities can prevent individuals from living their lives normally. To avoid triggering their anxiety, sufferers may have to sacrifice their interpersonal relationships, which then will further inflict other issues.

Anxiety is a prevalent mental health condition globally, with multiple epidemiological studies indicating a clear increase in the disease's occurrence among teenagers and young adults (He et al., 2021). A report by World Health Organization (2017) disclosed that globally, people living with anxiety disorders are estimated to have reached 264 million. This had increased compared to the previous years, as a result of growing population. Anxiety disorders greatly affect the sufferer. It may hinder them from living their day to day routines due to the emotional distress, therefore troubling their social function. Additionally, this disorder might also affect the sufferer's family or acquaintances.

Anyone can develop an anxiety disorder. However certain factors such as genetics, traumatic experiences, or severe stress may contribute to an increased chance of developing an anxiety disorder. One study concerning the identification of causes that lead to development of anxiety disorders, stated that neuroticism is one of the most significant factors that lead to anxiety (He et al., 2021). Mistreatment experienced throughout an individual's childhood may also cause

the development of anxiety disorder in the later years. Craske and Stein (2016) explained the higher risk of anxiety disorder is linked to childhood maltreatment, physical punishment during childhood, a history of mental health issues in parental figures, low socio-economic status, and an extremely strict or overprotective parenting style. Although closely related and often mistaken for one another, fear and anxiety are distinctively different. Fears occur when an individual senses an approaching danger or threat, while anxiety is an emotional response that occurs when an individual perceives future threats.

To address an anxiety disorder, individuals must seek treatment at the earliest which will help to identify the causes of the issue. Among the many methods, psychoanalysis can be implemented to overcome anxiety disorders. Psychoanalysis is a psychological approach and theory first coined by an Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud. Freud's psychoanalysis framework is broadly used to explore and comprehend the human mind. His theory aims to examine the unconscious level of human mind. Freud's psychoanalysis theory divided the human mind into two levels, conscious and unconscious. Additionally, the unconscious level can be further divided into unconscious proper and preconscious. Furthermore, Freud also introduced the three provinces of human mind, known as the id, ego, and superego. Each of these provinces belong to different levels of the human mind (Freud in Feist & Robert, 2020). Freud's psychoanalysis also explores the dynamics of human personality which consist of drives and anxiety. In order to cope with these dynamics, the human mind develop defense mechanisms. According to Freud (1922), psychoanalysis, as an

approach to the human's mind which explores the unconscious, can be used to treat many conditions such as anxiety (Bertens, 2016).

Alex Michaelides is a British-Cypriot screenwriter and author of the novel *The Silent Patient* (2019), *The Maiden* (2021), and *The Fury* (2024). His debut psychological thriller novel *The Silent Patient* gained its popularity among thriller enthusiasts, making it the *New York Times* Bestseller. In an interview with *Barnes and Noble* (2019), he revealed that he had prior experiences working in a psychiatric unit. This experience alongside other factors are what inspired him in writing *The Silent Patient*. In another interview with *Varsity* (2024), he expressed that the reason he writes is to overcome the difficulties he's had growing up. Through writing, he's able to analyse and explore these issues.

The *Silent Patient* novel is a contemporary psychological thriller written by Alex Michalides. The story revolves around the main character Alicia Berenson who was found guilty of murdering her husband. After the incident, Alicia went silent and never spoke a word. The bizarre response of Alicia intrigues a psychiatric Theo Faber. Theo, one of the main narrators of the story is determined to put an end to Alicia's silent and reveal the truth of the incident. The research on this particular novel had been done by other researchers (Shoukat et al., 2021; Hossain, 2021; Priyaa, 2022), however, the previous researches differed from this study as they analyzed different issues of the novel. Additionally, there are many preceding studies that discuss the issue of neurotic anxiety (Viki Pratama Hadju, 2018; Manulang, 2020; Awaliyah Pimay, 2022; Putri Haryanti & Murtiningrum, 2022; Lerianto Suwoto & Cahyaning Rahayu, 2022; Saiudin &

Kunthara Anindita, 2023). Thus, this study will analyze the root of Alicia Berenson's neurotic anxiety disorder as it has yet to be explored in the previous studies. The *Silent Patient* novel is chosen for this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, *The Silent Patient* is a popular psychological thriller novel that won an award as the best mystery and thriller novel (Goodreads Choice Awards, 2019). It also focuses on the psychological theme of the story as it tells the psychological condition of Alicia Berenson and Theo Faber as her Psychiatrist. The complexity of the character's personality is also suitable to be analysed using Freud's psychoanalysis theory.

1.2 Research Questions

In accordance with the background of the study, this research concerns to address the following questions:

1. What are the causes of Alicia Berenson's neurotic anxiety in *The Silent Patient* novel?
2. How does Alicia Berenson's neurotic anxiety influence her demeanour as the effect of neurotic anxiety in *The Silent Patient* novel?

1.3 Objectives of Study

Following the research questions of the study, the objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To explore the causes of Alicia Berenson's neurotic anxiety in *The Silent Patient* novel.

2. To find out how Alicia Berenson's neurotic anxiety influences her demeanour as the effect of neurotic anxiety in *The Silent Patient* novel.

1.4 Scope and Limitation of the Study

Based on psychoanalysis theory there are three types of anxiety, however, this study focuses on the neurotic anxiety experienced by the main character, Alicia Berenson, in *The Silent Patient*. This study examines the root of Alicia Berenson's neurotic anxiety issue and how it affects her demeanour throughout the novel. Freud's psychoanalysis theory is used to analyse and explore the cause of Alicia Berenson's neurotic anxiety. There have been several studies done with the appliances of the psychoanalysis theory. However, this study will not be analyzing other literature novels and therefore will be limited to the analysis of *The Silent Patient* novel focusing on Alicia Berenson's neurotic anxiety issue.

1.4 Significance Of The Study

The result of this study is expected to contribute to academic readers and readers in general, as a reference for psychoanalysis theory and the appliances to analyse literatures. It is also hoped to provide more informations for future research that explores anxiety issues.