

Psychological Perception of Food in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*

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Food is an essential part of life. It plays an important role in maintaining proper health. It is basic need of human body. Healthy food increases life span. Food makes a connection between the good environment, nutrition and health. It improves one's mental health. Some people are aware of this connection and able to understand the link between nutrition and mental illness. Mental health and stability are very significant factors in everyday life.

Intake of food helps to grow and keep good health throughout life. Mental health, physical health and social health are important and associated with the life of an individual. Mental health determines the state of being healthy and happy in an individual. Most of the people live with mental illness as a result of their insufficient nutritious food. People with mental illness face many obstacles in their life. Poor economic condition also leads people to poor mental health.

Hunger plays a major role in causing mental illness. Hunger happens due to lack of basic food with energy and nutrients. Psychologically, healthy food helps in developing a sound mental health whereas malnutrition leads a person into depression.

Roald Dahl is a well-known writer of Children literature. He is creative and has a unique writing style. He teaches lessons through the characters of children. He attracts the reader's attention by his writings. He uses many literary devices and figures of speech. His writing style is mixed with suspense and excitement. His literary works are bursting with examples and food imagery that connects with the character. He often viewed the world through food. Most of his works deals with food like *The Big Friendly Giant*, *Matilda* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. He remains as the world's number one story teller.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is a story which teaches moral values, importance of food and chocolate. The readers of *The London Times* chose this book as the most popular book for children of all times. This book was adapted into a movie which was a big hit. Most of the readers voted *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* as the most significant children's book.

Charlie Bucket is the protagonist of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. His whole family lives together in a small wooden house which is situated on the edge of great town. The house is too small, and they feel uncomfortable. He is the only child of the desperate poor family.

Charlie's father Mr. Bucket is the only person in the family who has a job. His income is not enough for the big family.

Healthy food and sleep lay the foundation for long term life. Healthy food can improve quality of sleep. Charlie's grandparents drink cabbage soup for supper. They have not left their bed for years. They lack physical health because of their old age as well as malnutrition. If one wants a pleasant sleep one has to eat fruits, vegetables and proteins. The expenses spent for caring the four of grandparents on a single person's income has forced the family into extreme poverty. This made Charlie's family to feel depressed.

Depression occurs due to stress. Stress is part of everyone's life. It creates worries and pressure which spoils one's health. It affects many people every day. Stress also affects both mental and physical health. Physical stress is due to thirst, hunger, lack of sleep, illness and lack of healthy food. This stress emotionally transforms into anger, grief and depression.

This depression affects Charlie's grandparents. Four of them, that is his father's parents and his mother's parents sleep in a single bed. They lack sound sleep and feel uncomfortable. They are so old and they are unable to earn money. Psychologically it is called as hypersomnia. According to psychologists:

Hypersomnia is a symptom that may occur as a normal response to sleep deprivation, secondary to medicines or secondary to serious underlying brain pathology. It is also a common presenting symptom of many sleep disorders. A careful history of sleep habits, including the time spent in bed or trying to sleep elsewhere, bed mate, noise level, safety and interruptions, is imperative for diagnosing and treating sleeping disorders. (Kahn 178)

In *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, it is described as "There were only two rooms in the place altogether and there was only one bed. The bed was given to four old grandparents because they were so old and tired" (5). This sentence clearly shows their depression and their deficiency of sleep promoting diet.

Charlie's father worked in a toothpaste factory. He worked for long hours in a day on a bench and screwed the little caps on to the top of the tubes of toothpaste. Even though he worked for long hours, he did not get extra money. He was unable to buy proper food for his family. They ate "bread and margarine for breakfast, boiled potatoes and cabbage for lunch, and cabbage soup for supper" (5). This food is not enough to promote health.

Charlie is suffering from severe malnutrition. The human body needs a balanced amount of nutrition and energy. Malnutrition results in tiredness, loss of energy and poor growth in children. It results from a lack of food. Malnutrition is strongly associated with ill health. Malnutrition is also caused by poverty that affects Charlie too. "Charlie himself - went about from morning till night with a horrible empty feeling in their tummies" (6).

Charlie grew so thinner. His face became white and pale, for the reason that of malnutrition. The place where his father worked had to close down. His father tried to get

another job but could not. As a result, food consumption was reduced as “Breakfast was a single slice of bread for each person now, and lunch was may be half a boiled potato” (46). This shows their desperate poverty and inadequate availability of food.

Lack of food affects Charlie’s physical and mental health. Lack of adequate healthy food can damage a child’s ability to concentrate and perform well in school. Charlie also walks slowly to school as he is weak and hungry. He sat silently in the class room during the break hour.

In the mornings, he left school, without having to run. He sat quietly in the class room during break, resting himself, while the others rushed out doors and threw snowballs and wrestled in the snow. Everything he did now, he did slowly and carefully, to prevent exhaustion. (49)

The above lines evidently show the depression and ill health of Charlie. This malnutrition is caused due to insufficient nutrition. According to Mosby’s Medical Dictionary malnutrition is “any disorder of nutrition. It may result from an unbalanced, insufficient, or excessive diet or from the impaired absorption, assimilation or use of foods” (Cope 5).

Chocolate plays a major role with the characters in the novel. Chocolate is one of the most popular foods all around the world. Chocolate is a healthy diet. It is good for one’s body. It helps the person to relax. When an individual is feeling sad, they may need something sweet like chocolate, because chocolate will create a pleasure feeling in the brain, as well as it stimulates the body. “Chocolate provides instant enjoyment and pleasure, and it also considered to be one of the favorite foods which are consumed during comfort eating, as well as being the most craved food” (Hetherington and Macdiarmid 233-246).

Charlie loves chocolate very much. “The one thing he longed for more than anything else was. . . CHOCOLATE” (6). Every day he used to walk to school in the mornings. He stands and wonders about the different types of chocolate in the big shops. As he was poor, he was unable to eat the chocolate he liked. But once in a year, on his birthday, he gets to taste a bit of chocolate because the whole family had saved up their money and bought him chocolate. This shows his longing for food and his poor condition which caused him depression.

Depression is a disorder associated with major symptoms such as increased sadness and anxiety, depressed mood and a loss of interest in pleasurable activities. Depression is more normally thought to be biochemical-based or emotionally-rooted. On the other hand, loss of nutrition can play a key role in the beginning as well as severity and duration of depression. Many of the easily noticeable food patterns that precede depression are the same as those that occur during depression. These may include poor appetite, skipping meals, and a dominant desire for sweet foods. Charlie’s depression is due to his desire for sweet food

During his journey with great Wonka’s chocolate factory, Mr. Wonka observed that Charlie was starved. So Mr. Wonka picks up a large mug dips into the chocolate river and fills it with chocolate and hands over to Charlie. “It’ll do you good! You look starved to death!” (99). It

shows Charlie's malnutrition. Charlie put the mug to his lips, and chocolate ran down through his throat into empty stomach. It gave him pleasure and happiness. Charlie said "Oh! Its Wonderful!" (99).

It expresses Charlie's malnutrition and his life in poverty. On the other hand, it clearly shows the effect of chocolate. Chocolate decreases blood pressure. It strengthens the immune system of body. It is beneficial for both mental and physical growth in kids.

Augustus Gloop is the other boy in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, who is opposite to Charlie. He stands for over loaded nutrition and looks so fat. His body itself shows that he is affected by over nutrition. Psychologically he was affected with eating disorder. Eating disorder is mental illness. It can exhibit over eating. Roald Dahl described "He eats so many bars of chocolate a day that it was almost impossible for him not to find one. Eating is his hobby, you know. That's all he's interested in" (26).

Augustus Gloop suffered from being a chocoholic. According to The Oxford Dictionary, chocoholic means a "habitual and prolific eater of chocolate; a person who is very fond of chocolate" (150). Eating large quantities of chocolate can do harm. It is also a kind of food addiction that brings serious problems. It has to be treated at an early stage.

Too much of chocolate eating causes obesity. Obesity is usually caused due to regular intake of excessive food. This problem may also be genetic or psychological. The risk factors include sadness, depression, and nervousness. In Wonka's chocolate factory, Augustus sneaks down to the edge of the chocolate river and begins to scoop melted chocolate into his mouth. Wonka begs him to stop dirtying his chocolate river and his mother tries to do the same, but he refuses, as he became fond of chocolate and was unable to control himself.

In the beginning of the story, Dahl introduced Augustus as a greedy boy. Greed helps one to reach their goals and strive for more. Sometimes it makes one selfish and irrational.

Here Augustus is greedy for food.

Chewing gum basically activates the neurological pathway of human beings. It makes a person to relax. It improves memory and reduces stress and anxiety. It increases the oxygen flow to the brain and makes a person to stay attentive. It can help maintain concentration.

Violet Beauregarde is a girl who chews gum all day long. "I am a gum chewer normally" (37). She chews gum ferociously, because she wants to beat the world record. Chewing gum is good for health, but continuously eating gum is not good for health. She is also suffering from eating disorder. She lacks control in eating. For example, in the trip of Wonka's factory, Wonka said to Violet that the chewing gum which he made, is not ready to eat yet. She does not hear Wonka's words and eats it.

This paper focuses on psychological aspects of food. Malnutrition causes poorer mental health and depression. Chocolate as shown in the novel gives happiness and pleasure. It has both

positives and negatives. To Charlie it gives him intense happiness, but for Augustus and Violet, it leaves them tempted. Thus, chocolate when consumed in limited quantity, brings goodness to one's health. Dahl therefore portrays that chocolate is a quality food that has to be included in every person's diet.

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