

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 11

Special Issue: 2

Month: March

Year: 2024

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Impact Factor: 3.025

Received: 02.02.2024

Accepted: 02.03.2024

Published: 30.03.2024

Citation:

Madhumitha, V., and
RM Sherlin Smile.

“Investigating the Impact
of Vicarious Trauma
Among Readers of *A
Little Life*.” *Shanlax
International Journal
of Arts, Science and
Humanities*, vol. 11,
no. S2, 2024, pp. 1–5.

DOI:

[https://doi.org/10.34293/
sijash.v11iS2-March.7495](https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v11iS2-March.7495)

Investigating the Impact of Vicarious Trauma among Readers of *A Little Life*

V. Madhumitha

*II MA English, Department of English
PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore*

Dr. R. M. Sherlin Smile

*Assistant Professor, Department of English
PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore*

Introduction

Psychologists have been documenting how therapists become susceptible to vicarious trauma from their repeated exposure to patients' harrowing experiences. Literary scholars, however, has largely overlooked the possibility of readers undergoing a similar process in response to fictional trauma narratives. Knowing about vicarious trauma is especially important in the recent times as many authors come up with gruesome depiction of trauma in their works. Most people encounter trauma vicariously through media be it electronic media or print media. Since such exposure might result in symptoms of secondary trauma, it is vital for people to know about the process as much as possible. However, there's little to no research that studies the effect of vicarious trauma among readers of Trauma narratives. This research aims to explore the effect the novel *A Little Life* has on readers who become witnesses of utmost intimacy to the protagonist's pain and thereby get affected vicariously by the vivid descriptions of the protagonist's horrible past.

Methodology

Aim

To trace vicarious trauma of readers of the novel *A Little Life* among college students of English and Psychology department.

Objectives

- To examine whether there's relativity between time taken to read the novel and the readers' development of vicarious trauma
- To assess and compare the level of vicarious trauma among students of English and Psychology department.

Research Design

This study was performed using a Descriptive Cross-Sectional Study.

Sampling

Sampling Method

The samples for the study were taken by using Convenience Sampling.

Sample Size

The data was collected from 30 participants. It included individuals from both genders: Male, Female and the age between 21–24. In the sample, there were 15 members from English department, and 15 members from Psychology department.

Inclusion Criteria

The criteria followed for selecting the samples were based on their:

1. Age group: 21-24 years
2. Genders: Male and Female
3. Their educational qualification i.e., Students pursuing an Undergraduate and Postgraduate level of education.

Exclusion Criteria

Individuals / Students from departments other than Psychology and English were excluded.

Operational Definition of Variables

Vicarious Trauma

People who naturally tend to be very empathetic are more susceptible to vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma can be defined as the emotional and psychological stress resulting from prolonged exposure to the suffering of others. It's essentially the impact of carrying the weight of someone else's trauma, even though you haven't directly experienced it yourself.

Tools Used

- Readers' Vicarious Impact Questionnaire (Primary Data)

Description of the Tool

The Questionnaire consists of 23 items. The questions were self-generated with the help of peer validation. It was then reviewed by an expert. Respondents were asked to respond each item on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (Never) – 1 to (Always) – 5.

Procedure

The data required for the study were collected online through Google forms. The participants were explained about the purpose of the study and an informed consent was obtained. They were also given assurance of confidentiality that their response and data would be used for study purpose only. The data was collected from 30 members: 15 each from Department of English and Psychology. Those who met the inclusion criteria were assessed by "Readers' Vicarious Impact" questionnaire. The data was then analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27.0. Descriptive Statistics, Independent Sample t-test were then performed.

Statistical Analysis

To understand the data, descriptive statistics were used to calculate Mean, Standard deviation, Minimum and Maximum. Independent sample t-test was then employed to assess and compare the levels of "Readers' Vicarious Impact" among college students in English and Psychology department.

Ethical Consideration

1. Informed consent was taken from each and every participant.
2. The participants were assured that the obtained results would be kept confidential and that their anonymity would be assured.
3. Participants were informed that they were free to drop out of the study at any given point in time.
4. All participants were informed regarding the availability of the researcher for further clarification if need arises.

Results and Discussion

The figures below show the descriptive statistics for Readers' Vicarious Impact scores among college students in English and Psychology department.

Descriptive	Readers' Vicarious Impact
Statistics	30
Minimum	37
Maximum	96
Mean	61.27
Standard Deviation	14.135

Figure 1.1

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total	30	37	96	61.27	14.135
Valid N (Listwise)					

Figure 1.2

The analysis revealed that the sample size was 30, with a minimum impact score of 37 and a maximum score of 96. The mean impact score was found to be 61.27, with a standard deviation of 14.135.

Variables		MEAN	SD	t	p-value
Readers' vicarious impact	English Department	67.33	16.779	2.669	0.004
	Psychology Department	55.20	7.311		

Figure 2.1

Figure 2.1 depicts the average impact of vicarious trauma on readers of English department (67.33) and readers of Psychology department (55.20) respectively. The analysis reveals that readers from English department suffered from vicarious trauma more than what the students of psychology did.

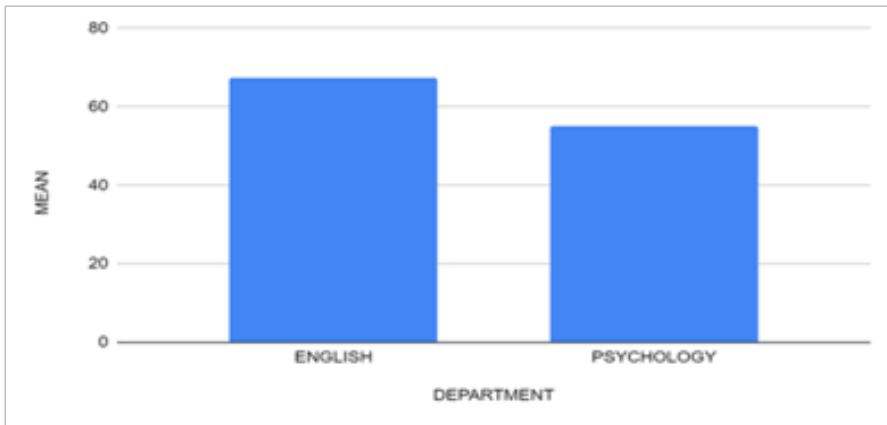


Figure 2.2

Figure 2.2 shows the graphical representation of the comparison of readers' vicarious impact between English and Psychology department.

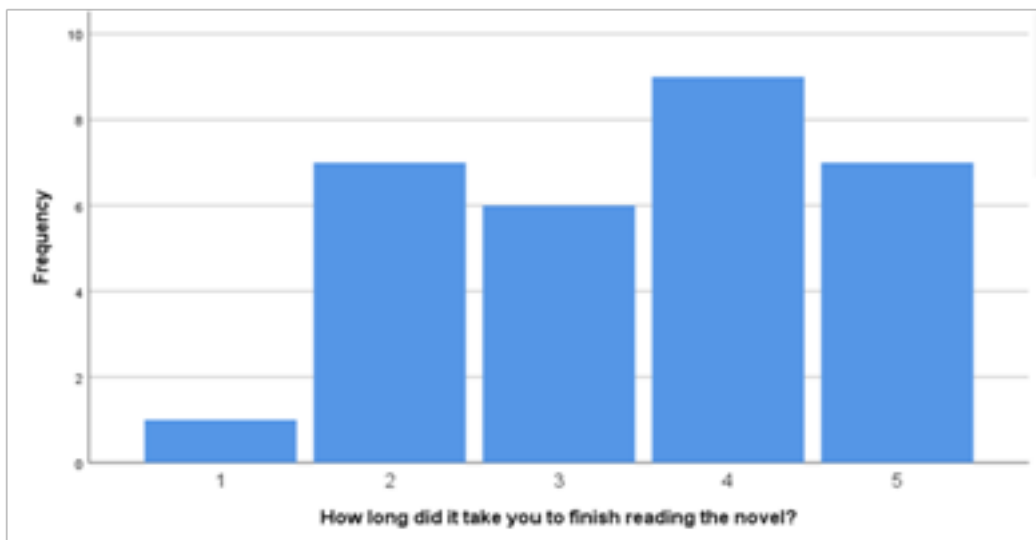


Figure 3

The graphical representation of the average time period taken by the responders reveals that 'time' was also a factor that had an impact on the readers developing vicarious trauma.

Discussion

Vicarious trauma has long been traced among therapists and first responders in fields of law enforcement, fire services, and emergency medical services among others, who develop it due to their constant exposure to others' trauma. However, little to no study has been documented on readers developing trauma vicariously through print media, especially through fictional trauma narratives. Therefore, the present study aims to evaluate the impact of the novel on the readers' mental well-being who become susceptible to developing vicarious trauma as they read the vivid, gruesome depictions of traumatic experiences inculcated in the works they read.

The present study aims to trace the vicarious effect the narrative *A Little Life* has on young

adults: college students from department of English and Psychology. It tries to compare the effect the book has on students from both the streams. The participants either had already read the novel or were recommended to read it via their peers without disclosing they would be taking part in a study regarding it.

Conclusion

The Study reveals that students from English department are more prone to develop vicarious trauma after reading the novel *A Little Life* and get affected by it. It becomes evident from the outcome of the study that time period did play a role in the readers' development of vicarious trauma.

Limitation

- The respondents were very limited and were specifically from English and Psychological department. If one broadens the spectrum of respondents, the result/score might get affected.
- Self-report measures might be subject to response bias.
- It wouldn't be right to generalize that readers definitely experience vicarious trauma with just the result of a survey with limited respondents.

Implication

- These findings underscore the need for a more in-depth examination of the readers being traumatized vicariously, with a focus on improving the awareness about VT among readers, especially young adults. The survey data emphasizes the need for the development of better intervention strategies for those affected by exposure to traumatic narratives.

Bibliography

1. Pearlman, Laurie Anne, and Paula S. Mac Ian. "Vicarious Traumatization: An Empirical Study of the Effects of Trauma Work on Trauma Therapists." *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, vol. 26, no. 6, 1995, pp. 558–65, <https://doi.org/10.1037//0735-7028.26.6.558>.
2. Rothschild, Babette, and Marjorie L. Rand. *Help for the Helper: The Psychophysiology of Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2006.
3. Sartor, Teri Ann. "Vicarious Trauma and Its Influence on Self-Efficacy." *Vistas Online*, 2016, pp. 1-13.