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Family as a Source of Strength in Times of Illness: A Study of Parental Support in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*

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Abstract: This paper attempts to examine why family becomes especially important during difficult periods of life, with particular reference to John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*. The novel explores cancer, love, friendship, suffering, death, and the emotional experiences of adolescents living with serious illness. At the centre of the novel is Hazel Grace Lancaster, a sixteen-year-old girl living with cancer. Her illness makes her constantly conscious of death and causes her to withdraw from social relationships. However, Hazel's parents, particularly her mother, provide her with continuous emotional, physical, and psychological support. They encourage her to participate in social activities, develop friendships, pursue her interests, and experience life as a normal teenager despite her illness. The novel demonstrates that family support is not limited to medical care or financial assistance; it also includes understanding, companionship, emotional security, encouragement, and respect for individual choices. Hazel's relationship with her parents illustrates how family can help an individual cope with fear, loneliness, suffering, and grief. This paper therefore examines the role of family in helping Hazel negotiate the psychological challenges associated with cancer and the possibility of death.

Keywords: Psychology, Cancer, Family Support, Adolescence, Solitude, Parents, Illness, Death, Resilience

Introduction

Family plays a significant role in the life of every individual. It is one of the primary sources of emotional security, affection, guidance, and social development. The relationship that children develop with their parents often becomes the foundation for their later relationships with other people. Parents provide not only material support but also emotional protection and encouragement, particularly during periods of physical and psychological difficulty. For adolescents, who are already experiencing significant emotional and social changes, serious illness can create additional challenges. In such circumstances, family support becomes particularly important.

Illness can affect an individual not only physically but also emotionally and psychologically. A young person suffering from a serious disease may experience fear, loneliness, anxiety, frustration, dependency, and uncertainty about the future. Adolescents may also feel that illness separates them from their peers and prevents them from experiencing an ordinary teenage life. Therefore, the role of parents becomes more complex. They must provide medical and practical care while simultaneously allowing their children to maintain a sense of independence and normalcy.

John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) presents the experiences of adolescents living with cancer. The novel focuses primarily on Hazel Grace Lancaster, a sixteen-year-old girl who has been living with thyroid cancer that has spread to her lungs. Hazel is highly conscious of her illness and mortality. She spends considerable time thinking about death and about the effect her eventual death may have on the people around her. Her illness causes her to withdraw from many social relationships, but her parents continually encourage her to participate in life rather than allowing cancer to define her entire identity.

John Green is an American novelist, essayist, and creator whose young adult fiction frequently explores friendship, love, adolescence, suffering, and identity. His experience working as a student chaplain at a children's hospital influenced his understanding of young people dealing with serious illness and contributed to his interest in writing about such experiences. His important works include *Looking for Alaska* (2005), *An Abundance of Katherines* (2006), *Paper Towns* (2008), *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), and *Turtles All the Way Down* (2017).

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, Green does not portray cancer merely as a physical disease. Instead, he explores the emotional consequences of illness for patients and their families. The novel demonstrates that the family members of a seriously ill person also experience fear, grief, and psychological stress. Nevertheless, Hazel's parents attempt to provide her with a secure environment in which she can continue to live, love, make choices, and develop relationships.

Family Support During Adolescence and Illness

Adolescence is a significant stage of human development. Young people begin to seek independence, establish friendships, develop romantic relationships, and construct their individual identities. Serious illness can interfere with these developmental processes. A teenager with cancer may become increasingly dependent on parents for transportation, medical care, financial support, and emotional assistance. In the novel, Hazel's parents understand these difficulties and attempt to balance protection with independence. They do not simply treat Hazel as a patient. They also recognize her as a young woman who wants to read, meet friends, fall in love, travel, and make her own decisions. This balance is an important aspect of their parenting. Hazel's parents themselves experience emotional suffering because of their daughter's illness. However, they attempt not to make Hazel responsible for their emotional pain. Their behaviour demonstrates an important dimension of parental love: protecting a child from unnecessary emotional burden while continuing to provide honest and compassionate support. (Mohitey & Sharma, 2026)

The Role of Hazel's Mother

Hazel's mother plays a particularly important role in the novel. She spends much of her time caring for Hazel, taking her to medical appointments, preparing food, driving her to places, and accompanying her during difficult situations. Her care demonstrates that family support involves everyday acts of love as much as major sacrifices. Hazel's mother also understands that Hazel requires more than physical care. She recognizes that her daughter needs opportunities to interact with other people and experience some form of normal teenage life. Consequently, she encourages Hazel to attend the Support Group. Haseen & Sait, 2026)

When Hazel initially resists attending the group, her mother insists:

"You're going to Support Group."
"UGGGGGGGGGGG."
"Hazel, you deserve a life." (p. 7)

This statement is important because it reveals her mother's understanding of Hazel's situation. She does not want Hazel to become completely defined by cancer. The words "you deserve a life" suggest that illness should not prevent Hazel from experiencing friendship, social interaction, happiness, and personal growth.

The Support Group also introduces Hazel to other young people who understand the experience of living with cancer. Although Hazel initially dislikes the meetings, they eventually become significant because they lead to her friendship with Augustus Waters and Isaac. Her mother's decision to encourage her to attend therefore indirectly creates an opportunity for Hazel to develop relationships outside her immediate family.

Family Care and Respect for Individual Needs

Another important characteristic of Hazel's mother is her ability to understand her daughter's individual needs. She does not force Hazel to follow a rigid routine simply because she is ill. For example, she allows Hazel to sleep until she wakes naturally rather than waking her early. She understands that Hazel needs rest because of her physical condition. This seemingly ordinary act demonstrates the mother's attentiveness. She observes Hazel's habits and recognizes the importance of allowing her daughter adequate rest. Her care is therefore based not only on medical necessity but also on an intimate knowledge of Hazel's personality and daily life.

Hazel's mother also attempts to make ordinary occasions special. She celebrates Hazel's "half birthday" and invites her friend Kaitlyn. Although such a celebration may appear unusual, it demonstrates her desire to create moments of happiness in Hazel's life. The celebration allows Hazel to spend time with a friend and temporarily move beyond the identity of a cancer patient. Similarly, when Hazel wants to visit a bookstore, her mother accommodates her interest. These small acts show that Hazel's parents understand her as a reader and as an individual with personal interests rather than simply as a patient who requires constant medical attention.

Supporting Hazel's Dreams

One of the clearest examples of parental support occurs when Hazel expresses her desire to travel to Amsterdam to meet Peter Van Houten, the author of *An Imperial Affliction*. Initially, her mother is concerned about the financial and practical difficulties involved in the journey. Hazel herself understands that her medical treatment places a financial burden on the family.

However, Hazel's mother does not immediately dismiss her daughter's wish. Instead, she considers whether the journey is genuinely important to Hazel and discusses the possibility with Hazel's father. This demonstrates an important aspect of family support: parents may have legitimate concerns, but they can still listen to and respect the wishes of their children.

Eventually, medical advice becomes an important factor in determining whether Hazel can travel. Her mother agrees to accompany her after learning that Hazel needs an adult familiar with her medical condition. In this way, the Amsterdam trip becomes more than a holiday. It represents the family's willingness to allow Hazel to experience life despite the restrictions created by her illness.

Protection Without Complete Control

Hazel's relationship with her parents also illustrates the difficult balance between protection and independence. Her parents are naturally concerned about her health, but they do not completely control her social life. Hazel is allowed to spend time with Augustus, and her mother understands that the two teenagers have developed romantic feelings for one another. Her mother's response reflects an important form of parental understanding. She recognizes that Hazel needs emotional relationships outside her family. Rather than preventing Hazel from developing a close relationship with Augustus simply because both teenagers have cancer, she allows Hazel to experience friendship and love.

This is significant because serious illness can make parents excessively protective. Hazel's mother, however, attempts to protect her daughter while also allowing her to experience the emotional aspects of adolescence. Her behaviour suggests that love does not always mean preventing risk; sometimes it means allowing another person to experience life while remaining available when support is needed.

Parents and the Psychological Burden of Illness

The novel also explores the psychological burden carried by Hazel's parents. Hazel is often afraid that her death will destroy them emotionally. She describes herself as a "grenade," suggesting that she believes her eventual death will cause emotional damage to everyone around her. Her parents respond to this fear by

reassuring her that she is not a burden. They tell her that she brings happiness into their lives. This moment is important because Hazel's greatest concern is not only her own death but also the suffering that her death might cause her family.

The response of Hazel's parents challenges the idea that a seriously ill person should view himself or herself as a burden. Their love helps Hazel understand that relationships cannot be measured only by the pain that may eventually accompany loss. The joy, affection, companionship, and memories created through a relationship are also meaningful.

The Hospital Experience

Hazel's hospitalization provides another example of parental care. When she experiences severe pain and is admitted to the hospital, her mother remains with her and attempts to comfort her. Hazel's illness places both physical and emotional pressure on the entire family, yet her mother continues to provide reassurance. The statement, "This is just a thing, Hazel" (p. 107), reflects an attempt to prevent Hazel from becoming overwhelmed by the immediate crisis. Her mother does not remove the pain, but she remains present while Hazel experiences it.

This distinction is important. Family members cannot always cure illness or eliminate suffering. However, they can ensure that the person does not face suffering alone. The physical presence of a loved one can itself provides psychological comfort.

The Amsterdam Journey and Family Responsibility

The Amsterdam journey further demonstrates the practical responsibilities assumed by Hazel's family. Although Augustus initially helps arrange the trip, Hazel's medical condition requires careful consideration. Her mother consults the doctor and eventually travels with Hazel. Hazel even acknowledges that her mother knows a great deal about her medical condition. This reflects the extent to which Hazel's mother has become involved in her daughter's treatment and daily care.

At the same time, Hazel's mother does not prevent Hazel from spending time alone with Augustus. She gives the young couple a certain degree of privacy. This shows that parental support can include knowing when to step back. Her decision is particularly meaningful because Hazel and Augustus are experiencing a relationship that is important to both of them. By allowing them some independence, Hazel's mother recognizes that emotional development remains important even in the presence of serious illness.

The Role of Hazel's Father

Although Hazel's mother receives considerable attention in the novel, Hazel's father also plays an important role in demonstrating family affection. When Hazel returns from Amsterdam, her father waits at the baggage claim with a sign celebrating his family. His actions reveal his affection and emotional attachment to Hazel.

Hazel's father also reads *An Imperial Affliction* because he wants to understand the book that is so important to his daughter. Although he does not consider himself a literary person, he makes the effort to read it because understanding Hazel's interests is another way of understanding her. His response demonstrates that parental love involves entering a child's world. He may not ashare Hazel's literary interests, but he recognizes their importance to her and makes an effort to understand them.

Family and the Fear of Death

Death is one of the central concerns of *The Fault in Our Stars*. Hazel's fear of death is closely connected to her fear of leaving her parents behind. After Augustus's death, Hazel becomes increasingly concerned about the possibility of her own death and about how her parents will cope without her. At one point, she worries

about what will happen to her parents after she dies. Her mother reassures her that she will continue to love Hazel even after her death. She also talks about her plans for the future, including her studies in social work and her desire to help families affected by illness.

This conversation becomes important because Hazel realizes that her parents are capable of imagining a future beyond her illness. Their lives will be deeply affected by loss, but they will continue to live. This does not diminish their love for Hazel; rather, it demonstrates the possibility of surviving grief. Hazel's parents therefore help her understand an important truth: love and pain can exist simultaneously. Loving someone does not guarantee freedom from suffering, but suffering does not make love meaningless.

Family as a Source of Hope

Hope is another important theme in the novel. Hope does not necessarily mean believing that a person will be cured. In Hazel's situation, hope can instead mean finding meaning in the time that remains, maintaining relationships, pursuing personal interests, and experiencing moments of happiness.

Hazel's parents provide this kind of hope. They do not simply tell Hazel that everything will be fine. Instead, they encourage her to live as fully as possible within the circumstances of her illness.

Their support enables Hazel to experience friendship with Augustus, travel to Amsterdam, meet an author she admires, spend time with friends, and continue reading. These experiences help her's parents are unaffected by fear or sadness. Instead, it refers to their ability to continue caring for Hazel despite their they may eventually lose their daughter. Nevertheless, they continue with everyday life. They cook, drive, attend appointments, accompany Hazel construct an identity that extends beyond being a cancer patient.

Family Resilience

The novel also presents family resilience. Resilience does not mean that Hazel's parents are unaffected by fear or sadness. Instead, it refers to their ability to continue caring for Hazel despite their own emotional difficulties.

The parents experience uncertainty throughout the novel. They know that Hazel's illness is serious, and they are aware that they may eventually lose their daughter. Nevertheless, they continue with everyday life. They cook, drive, attend appointments, accompany Hazel to social activities, communicate with doctors, and support her relationships.

Their resilience is therefore expressed through ordinary acts of care. The novel suggests that strength is not always dramatic. Sometimes it is found in the decision to continue loving and caring for someone despite knowing that the future is uncertain.

The Importance of Communication

Communication is another important aspect of Hazel's relationship with her parents. Hazel does not always communicate her feelings calmly. At times, her fear and frustration cause her to become angry with them. However, her parents do not abandon communication when conflict occurs with respect for her daughter's independence. She encourages Hazel to attend the Support Group, supports her interests, celebrates important moments, accompanies her to Amsterdam, cares for her during hospitalization, and allows her to develop a relationship with Augustus. Hazel's father similarly demonstrates his love through his efforts to understand his daughter's interests and through Hazel's parents understand that she must be allowed to live her life, form friendships, fall in love, make choices, and experience happiness. Their support that her death will destroy her parents and views herself as a "grenade." Gradually, she understands that the relationships she shares with as a social institution but as a source of emotional resilience. Through everyday acts of care, communication, sacrifice, understanding, and encouragement, Hazel's parents help her move beyond the limitations imposed by illness. The novel ultimately suggests that although family cannot always remove.

They listen to her fears and attempt to reassure her. This is particularly significant when Hazel worries about being a burden. Her parents explain that she is not a source of suffering but a source of love and happiness. Open communication allows Hazel to express emotions that she might otherwise suppress. It also allows her parents to understand her fears. The novel therefore suggests that emotional support depends not only on physical presence but also on the willingness to listen.

Conclusion

John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* presents family as one of the most important sources of emotional and psychological strength during periods of illness. Through Hazel Grace Lancaster and her parents, the novel demonstrates that serious illness affects not only the patient but the entire family. Hazel's parents experience fear, anxiety, financial pressure, and the possibility of losing their daughter. Nevertheless, they continue to provide her with affection, security, encouragement, and companionship.

Hazel's mother is particularly important because she combines protection with respect for her daughter's independence. She encourages Hazel to attend the Support Group, supports her interests, celebrates important moments, accompanies her to Amsterdam, cares for her during hospitalization, and allows her to develop a relationship with Augustus. Hazel's father similarly demonstrates his love through his efforts to understand his daughter's interests and through his constant emotional presence.

The novel also challenges the idea that family support is simply about protecting an ill person from suffering. Hazel's parents understand that she must be allowed to live her life, form friendships, fall in love, make choices, and experience happiness. Their support therefore involves both care and freedom.

Most importantly, the novel shows that family can help an individual confront the psychological challenges of illness and death. Hazel initially fears that her death will destroy her parents and views herself as a "grenade." Gradually, she understands that the relationships she shares with her family are valuable not because they are free from pain but because they contain love, meaning, and shared experiences.

Thus, *The Fault in Our Stars* portrays family not merely as a social institution but as a source of emotional resilience. Through everyday acts of care, communication, sacrifice, understanding, and encouragement, Hazel's parents help her move beyond the limitations imposed by illness. The novel ultimately suggests that although family cannot always remove pain or prevent loss, it can ensure that an individual does not face suffering alone.

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