

## ผลกระทบจากการกักกันตัวทางการแพทย์ในวอลเปเปอร์สีเหลืองของ

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ผู้ประสานงานหลัก

### บทคัดย่อ

“วอลเปเปอร์สีเหลือง” ของ ชาร์ลอตต์ กิลแมน เป็นหนึ่งในตัวบทวรรณกรรมที่ตั้งคำถามต่อความชอบธรรมของแพทย์และสถานพยาบาลในการบังคับใช้การกักกันตัวผู้ป่วย โดย จุดประสงค์ของบทความนี้ มุ่งวิเคราะห์ผลกระทบ 3 ส่วน จากการถูกกักกันทางการแพทย์ คือ 1) ผลกระทบในด้านเสรีภาพส่วนบุคคล 2) ผลกระทบต่อสถาบันครอบครัว 3) ผลกระทบทางเศรษฐกิจ โดยการศึกษาในครั้งนี้ ผู้วิจัยได้ เลือก ทฤษฎีเรื่องเล่าความเจ็บปวด เป็นกรอบที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ตัวบท บทสรุปของการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่า แม้ว่าบรรดาคณะแพทย์จะยังไม่มีความรู้ความเข้าใจที่เพียงพอในการรักษาและตอบสนองโรคอุบัติใหม่ แต่สถานภาพทางสังคมและความรู้ที่สูงกว่าของแพทย์นั้น ทำให้แพทย์สามารถสร้างความชอบธรรม ในการบังคับใช้แนวทางการรักษาที่อาจส่งผลกระทบกับสิทธิเสรีภาพของบุคคลทั่วไป ในส่วนผลกระทบด้านสถาบันครอบครัว การศึกษาสะท้อนให้เห็นว่า แพทย์ควรหลีกเลี่ยงการให้การรักษาผู้ป่วยซึ่งเป็นสมาชิกในครอบครัวเพราะจะขัดต่อหลักจรรยาบรรณแพทย์ ในประเด็นผลกระทบทางเศรษฐกิจนั้น ผู้ป่วยสมควรถูกจำกัดบทบาทให้อยู่แต่ในบริเวณบ้านเท่านั้น ประโยชน์ที่ได้รับจากการศึกษาผลกระทบจากการกักบริเวณผู้ป่วยอย่างไม่เต็มใจ ในครั้งนี้ จะทำให้บุคลากรทางแพทย์มีความเข้าใจ และเห็นอกเห็นใจผู้ป่วย ในฐานะมนุษย์มากยิ่งขึ้น อีกทั้งควรมีการปรับปรุงสิ่งแวดล้อมที่ในสถานที่กักกันให้เหมาะสม โดยคำนึงถึงสวัสดิภาพทั้งทางร่างกายและจิตใจของผู้ถูกกักกันด้วย

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## The Effect of Medical Isolation in Charlotte Gilman's the Yellow Wallpaper

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### Abstract

Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is one of literary texts which question the legitimacy of the physicians and medical establishments' authority in relation to medical isolation prescription. The study aims to analyze three effects of the medical isolation namely, 1) the personal rights violation, 2) the effects on family institution and 3) economic impact. For theoretical framework, the researcher limits the scope of the study solely to the illness narratives theories. The conclusion of the study suggests that physicians manage to use academic and social superiority to exercise their authority over patients' freedom and enforce the use of medical isolation despite having inadequate knowledge. This study suggests that patients should be treated with empathy. In case that the medical isolation is assigned, the wellbeing aspect must also be taken into consideration. Additionally, the confined space must be well-maintained and kept in a good condition.

**Keywords:** Illness Narratives, Patients Right, Medical Isolation

## Introduction

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an American writer. Her best-known novel was 'Herland' (1915). Gilman was also known for the book entitled "Women and Economics (1899)" which also gave her a status of social activist. Before writing "The Yellow Wallpaper", Gilman was briefly suffered from a postpartum depression which appeared to be unknown among medical community in that era. The short story, "the Yellow Wallpaper", written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman was first appeared in The New England Magazine in 1892. In Pop Culture, The Yellow Wallpaper has been adapted into movie three times (Clive, 1989; Pontuti, 2021; Thomas, 2021). In the initial stages, Gilman followed the medical advice of refraining from writing and abstaining from work. She was also taken into medical isolation for 3 months including a month lying in a darked room. As soon as she became convalescent, she wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper* and sent the copy to Dr. Mitchell who never admitted that he almost made her crazy. The writing took the form of a letter she addressed to herself (an epistolary writing). Thus, it can be implied that this short story is her semi- autobiography. The initial reaction from physicians in Boston and Kansas was extremely hostile. Physicians vehemently criticized that her short story could drive readers into madness. However, Gilman defends that she has no intention to make anyone mad. By contrast, her literary texts gave vivid images "to save people from being driven crazy". Literary text written in 1892, at first glance, may appear to be obsolete. However, albeit thirteen decades apart, controversial issues found in this short story including personal right versus public health security are still much debated. Consequently, tackling this text through the 21<sup>st</sup> century's theoretical lens of could potentially destabilize various beliefs once never contested. The experience that Gilman went through and subsequently conveyed through her literary work holds great importance in understanding medical issues in the present times. In today's context, with the restrictions enforced by medical experts during the Covid-19 pandemic, various entities like governments, businesses, and individuals strive to find justification to reclaim control over their lives. Literary works, such as "The Yellow Wallpaper," inspired by personal experiences, serve as a means for people to renegotiate their rights over their own bodies.

## Objectives of the study

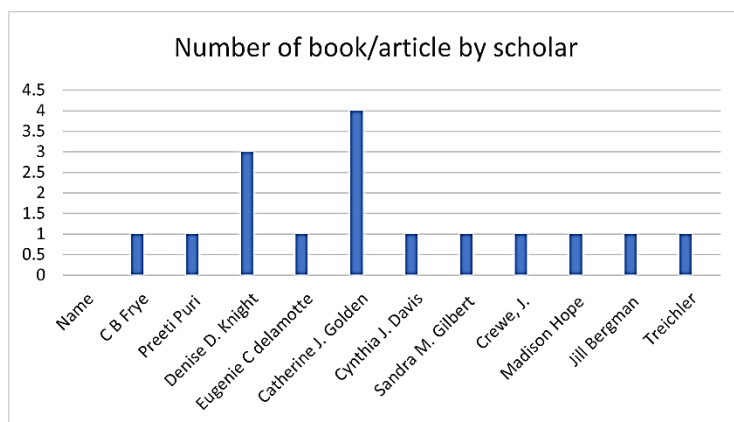
The study aims to analyze three effects of the medical isolation namely

- 1) The personal rights violation
- 2) The negative effects on family institution and 3) the economic impact.

## Methodology

This paper is documentary research. The first step is to review the previous studies to see the gap in establishing new findings. The result of the study is the analysis of effect of the medical isolation. The discussion is the comparison between the previous studies and the results found by the researcher. The conclusion is the applicable benefits of this findings

## Previous studies



The most prolific scholar who contributes works on “Yellow Wallpaper is Catherine Golden, followed by Denise Knight (Table 1). The central conflict of the narrator was projected through her language. The cat-like act at the opening scene of the story when the narrator tried to investigate everything refers to the reclaiming of the women territory (Golden, 2007). Her objection for the new setting became increasingly intense after she has entered to her room. Her room was depicted as “The color is repellent, almost revolting; a smoldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight (Treichler, 1984). “It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulfur tints in others”. The signified of yellow, the bodily metaphor, was menstruation and female genitalia (Golden, 2007). Therefore, the nuisance experience is unique to women which men can never understand.

Previous studies on "The Yellow wallpaper" were also written by the medical professionals. Among these are Fyre and Treichler). Fyre argued that to detain women in the house was to reestablish the status quo of the patriarchal society. From the past medical history, Fyre revealed that Dr. Mitchell prescribed “a moral medication” to Gilman. Therefore “the rest cure” seemed to be his moral project rather than the scientific remedy. Dr. Mitchell also shown his views that an increasing number of

professional women was “a moral degradation” (Frye, 1998). This vivid imagery connotes the utterance of the unescapable of female discomfort. The British National Archives has tested 275 Victorian wallpapers and found that all of them contain arsenic (Meier, 2016). By exposure to this arsenical wallpaper, Charlotte could have become ill slowly.

Regarding the writing style, Charlotte Perkins Gilman is one of the woman Gothic writers. From the repetitive use of Gothic depiction such as “dead, ghostliness, horror, commit suicide, haunted etc.” (Delamotte, 1988).

The following table illustrates the main findings of each previous academic work on “The Yellow Wallpaper”

**Table 1:**

Scholar	Key findings of Book/Articles
C B Frye (1998)	Investigated writer's personal life
Denise D. Knight	2003- In “Approaches to Teaching Gilman's "The Yellow Wall-Paper" and Herland”, Knight used traditional approach to emphasize on author's personal biography
Preeti Puri (2020)	Using Deleuzo-Guattarian approaches to explain the root cause of the Jane's suffering. The conclusion is she suffered greatly as she struggled to fulfill the doctor's gaze.
Eugenie Delamotte(1998)	Sees the works as a gothic literature, try to answer why woman reinvent mysteries, and contends that this writing is a self-defense
Catherine J. Golden	2003-The captive imagination a casebook on the yellow wallpaper (book) 2007-The Metaphor of Feline behavior
Cynthia J. Davis (2004)	Exploration of Gilman's lifetime (including the fact that that Gilman recovered swiftly after moving to California, given up her child custody and finally took her own life).
Crewe, J. (1995)	The function of the attic room is used as a schoolroom where the main protagonist is being disciplined.
Madison Hope (2020)	Concludes that it is a horror genre
Jill Bergman (2017)	Asserts that Gilman still maintain xenophobic attitude albeit presenting herself as a feminist activist
Treichler (1984)	Metaphor of the woman discourse

### Synopsis of the story

Jane, the protagonist was a young woman. Due to her illness, she could not perform her wifely and motherly duties properly. John, her husband rented a beautiful house in the countryside for the summer so that she can rest. The narrator was advised against having a wild imagination and was prescribed the permanent bed rest. Despite the reassurance from her husband, the narrator thought it was strange that the house was left unattended for an extended period. She did not like the appearance of the house. The room where she supposed to relax appals her. Refrained from engaging in the professional activities, the narrator became obsessed with the patterns in the wallpaper. In her isolation, she started to write secretly about a woman who was trapped inside the wallpaper whom she must free. The last night in this house she locked herself in the room and tries to peel off the whole wallpaper. John broke into the room, but he fainted, and the trapped woman who was, in fact, herself got out of the room by crawling over John's body. The full text of this short story can also be obtained at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1952/1952-h/1952-h.htm>

### Theoretical Framework

First and foremost, a key terminology is defined to avoid potential misunderstanding. In this article, the term “Medical Isolation” is used as Isolation means separation of sick people from people who are not sick. It is also worthwhile to mention the differences between “isolation” and “quarantine”. The confinement of the character has encountered does not fall into the meaning of quarantine. Quarantine barely means the restriction of the movement of the people who were exposed to the disease to see if they become sick. These people may have the disease and do not know it, or they may have the disease but do not show symptoms (The US Department of Health and Human Services, 2022).

By the time this short story was written, the social knowledge among medical practitioners was very limited, especially the constructed knowledge about women. There were numerous mystifications against women circulated by the medical institutions. The concept of “disease” in the ancient Greek antiquity era, was known as a disturbance to the harmony and equilibrium (Canguilhem, 1991). From humanistic point of view, these following key terms “disease”, “sickness”, and “illness” are different. “*Disease*” is a pathology from biomedical perspectives requiring diagnosis whereas “*illness*” deals with the psychological aspect of patients’ feelings, followed by “*Sickness*” which is how the society perceive the phenomena (Singer, 2007). In 1926, the meaning of “*disease*” was extended from merely tiny microorganism to men’s struggle to adapt to his environment (Mccann, 1952). To summarize, Illness narratives in literature

refer to literary works that explore the experiences of individuals facing illness, disease, or medical conditions. These narratives often provide an intimate and personal account of the physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of illness. They can be found in various literary genres, including novels, memoirs, essays, and poetry.

## Analysis

After completing the review literature, the researcher has found that the knowledge gap and the possible research questions are likely to the topic of the violation of the personal right, the effects on family institution and economic impact which have not been adequately addressed yet. The commentary is threefold. Firstly, it will demonstrate the effect of the personal rights violation. Secondly, it will discuss negative effects on family institution. Lastly, it will explore the economic impact caused by the medical isolation.

### The effect of the personal rights violation



[Photo 1: An isolation area assigned for the Thai migrant workers returning from South Korea during the Covid Pandemic in Buriram Province]

Medical isolation, especially when enforced for extended periods, can have significant effects on personal rights. Some of the effects of personal rights violation caused by medical isolation might lead to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, depression, and stress. Human beings are social creatures, and social interactions are essential for maintaining mental well-being. When deprived of these interactions, individuals can experience a decline in their mental health.

Being forcibly isolated can result in a loss of personal freedom and autonomy. Individuals may feel powerless and unable to make decisions about their own lives and activities. It is also possible to speculate that isolated individuals might face stigma and discrimination from others, leading to feelings of marginalization and exclusion.

### The negative effects on family institution

In terms of medical ethics, physicians must avoid treating themselves and their own family members including their own friends. Since the treatments require physician's objectivity, the emotional involvement of the physicians could compromise objectivity from their doctors (AMA council of Ethical and Judicial Affairs, 2012). The frustration caused by "the rest cure" was intensified by the devoid of trust. The lack of compassion and understanding portrayed in the short story suggested unhappy reunion between the narrator and her husband. The narrator described her husband as a man of science. She said "John is practical in extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures". By attempting to fulfill the "rational demand" from her husband, the narrator was obliged to suppress her emotion. His objective worldview tends to focus solely on physical sides rather than mental side. Through medical discourse, the narrator is controlled not only her body, but also her mind. In this regard, objectivity focuses on presenting information without personal influence, aiming for neutrality and accuracy. On the other hand, subjectivity embraces personal viewpoints and emotions, allowing for individual expression and interpretation.

The choice of phrase "of high standing" could also be interpreted as the phallus. The narrator challenged the male supremacy by saying, "*If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression-a slight hysterical tendency-what is one to do?*".

"In The Yellow Wallpaper", the main conflict between the narrator and her husband was the state of captivity without the narrator's consent. In other words, the room appeared to be a prison for her. The residential landscapes were also gendered (Bondi, 1992). Despite her husband (also her doctor)'s opinion, the narrator did not feel well. She had avid curiosity to every detail which flows into her perception. At the beginning, she noticed that the house was left unattended for extended of time. "*John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage*". Her new terrain was not only her house, but it was also her nursery. The narrator noticed the function of the room as schoolroom or a gymnasium where schoolboys used to be *disciplined* (Crewe, 1995). Besides, the act of moving the narrator to the upper floor symbolized the marginalization of women. Men occupy the public space whereas women were domesticated.

There was a power struggle against patriarchal system in the text. As a physician, men occupied the public spaces whereas women's terrain was home. The boundary of male and female was clearly set. The narrator mentioned that John had hour for her



prescription, which was an act of surveillance. John as doctor has work, and recognizable knowledge to conduct diagnosis on his spouse who was portrayed as a victim of imagination. However, the text presented the struggle of a woman to deliberate herself from this patriarchal dominance. The narrator observed her new surrounding that “One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin”. The ugly structure she saw inside the yellow wallpaper was an unequal social system which confined women within the domestic terrain.

### The economic Impact

“*The Yellow Wallpaper*” appears to be a demonstration of the possible economic drawback caused by the medical isolation. When the narrator is isolated or quarantined, she was unable to work or engage in economic activities. This leads to a loss of productivity, which can have a negative impact not just on herself but also on the overall economy. The narrator’s former work was assumably a writer. As she was not allowed to work unless John, her husband thinks she was better, she became economically dependent. Additionally, medical isolation tends to reduce people's spending on non-essential products and services. This decrease in consumer expenditure can have adverse effects on businesses such as the entertainment, travel, and luxury goods industries.



### Discussion

Key characteristics of “*The Yellow Wallpaper*” include:

First-person perspective: Since it was written from the perspective of the person experiencing the illness. This personal point of view allows the reader to delve deeply into the emotional and psychological impact of the condition.

Emotional exploration: A wide range of emotions, including doubt, frustration, anger, fear is exhibited in the story. These emotions are essential for depicting the complex human response to illness.

Subjectivity: The experiences of illness are unique to everyone, and these narratives reflect the personal influences that shape one's perception of the illness.

Medical and social contexts: the story delves into the medical aspects of the condition, including symptoms, treatments, and interactions with healthcare professionals. It also examines the impact of illness on one's relationships, family dynamics, and social life.

### **Conclusion and Applicable Benefits**

After reaching the room adorned with yellow wallpaper, the narrator carefully observed and analyzed the details of the space she had entered. With her sharp reasoning, she connected the remnants of the house's history, the color choice, and the potential reasons for the estate's deteriorating state. This logical analysis countered the notion that she was insane as her husband believed. Instead, she tried to express herself as coherently as possible, challenging the label of insanity attributed to her.

Illness narratives serve multiple purposes, including raising awareness about specific medical conditions, breaking the silence around health issues, providing a sense of catharsis for the author, and offering readers an opportunity to gain insight into the human condition. These narratives can be powerful tools for empathy, understanding, and fostering connections between individuals who have experienced similar health challenges. Revisiting this short story in 2023 which is more than hundred years apart suggests that human's destiny could fall into destruction if one fail to learn from the past. There is a danger of the medical monopoly in handling individuals who may undergo physical or mental challenges. The personal experiences in "The Yellow Wallpaper" revealed that the impact of medical isolation appears to be immense. The academic contribution in analyzing the adverse effects of involuntary confinement is to sensitize medical practitioners in providing cares with empathy. Mental condition could also deteriorate if the environment of the confined space is not in good condition. Most importantly, apart from therapeutic responsibilities, medical practitioners should provide cares with empathy. To maintain harmonious conjugal relationship, physicians must avoid treating their respective spouses as the medical ethics can be compromised.

It is important to note that while medical isolation can have significant economic drawbacks, its implementation is often necessary to protect public health and prevent the further spread of infectious diseases, which can have even more severe economic

consequences in the long run. Policymakers must carefully balance public health concerns with the economic impact when implementing such measures.

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