

DRAMATHERAPY: THE ROLE OF CATHARSIS IN EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH IMPROVEMENT

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Abstract: As awareness for the importance of mental and emotional health increases, experts are exploring multiple strategies to help people reduce anxiety and depression through everyday habits that support mental and emotional well-being. One of those habits includes being part of artistic experiences such as cinema, concerts, or theater. This article aims to investigate the therapeutic potential of drama and theater as an effective medium for enhancing mental health and emotional well-being. Deriving from Aristotle’s concept of catharsis, this potential of dramatic activities has, in the last years, been the focus not only of the drama therapists but also of other settings, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study we tend to examine how engagement in dramatic and theatrical experiences improves psychological and emotional regulation by integrating theoretical perspectives from performance and applied drama studies to conceptualize the mechanisms through which dramatic participation fosters emotional release. By using a mixed method including a literature review of actual studies on this field and analyzing quantitative data, this paper aims to identify consistent evidence indicating that dramatic involvement (role-play, improvisation, being part of an audience in theater etc.), correlates with significant reductions in symptoms of depression and anxiety, not only when used by professionals in psychological post-traumatic settings, but also as a sporadic solution in everyday life. The quantitative data was gathered through questionnaires designed to measure how dramatic activities influence individuals’ emotional and mental well-being. These questionnaires included items related to anxiety levels, emotional releases and overall psychological comfort after engaging in dramatic or theater experiences. The findings of this study may offer new perspectives on how simple and sporadic artistic interactions can serve as meaningful tools for maintaining mental and emotional balance.

Keywords: dramatic experience, catharsis, anxiety

1. INTRODUCTION

The increased awareness of mental and emotional health well-being encouraged the adoption of supporting approaches that aim to improve mental and emotional well-being. In this context, dramatic activities are widely recognized for their role in reducing anxiety and improving psychological well-being by creating an environment where individuals can express and reorganize their emotional experiences (Jiang, Alizadeh, & Cui, 2023). Drama through action, symbolism, and role play offers a deep emotional exploration process that contributes to clarifying the inner emotional and psychological state (Orkibi, 2018). Several qualitative studies have emphasized that participating in dramatic activities improves interpersonal relationships by being perceived by participants as an experience with a positive impact (de Gruijter, Wouters, & Haeyen, 2024; Constein, Khanna, & Wiberg, 2025). On the other hand, empirical findings show also that dramatic methods such as psychodrama can significantly reduce anxiety (Zayman & Simsek, 2023). Communities and educational settings also observe these positive impacts, as participation in dramatic activities enhances social sensitivity and empathy (Gjergji Halili & Doce, 2020). As a theoretical basis for the emotional impact that drama has, its roots are in Aristotle’s concept of catharsis as a relief process (Aristotle, trans. 1996). This concept is commonly used to explain the relieved emotional experience felt during and after receiving a dramatic act as part of an audience. Contemporary literature highlights that dramatic activities are particularly useful for young people and those who experience emotional difficulties or lack safe environments to express themselves (Keiller et al., 2023). Building on this framework, this study aims to analyze participants’ perceptions of the impact that dramatic activities have on their emotional and mental health. The data collected using the Likert scale aim to offer an overview of how individuals interpret and perceive the effects of these activities in their daily lives, outside the formal clinical settings.

2. METHODS

This study follows a descriptive quantitative approach using an anonymous online questionnaire aiming to evaluate participants’ perceptions of the emotional and mental health impact of dramatic activities. Because of the free and voluntary participation, subjects are individuals of different ages and genders, without a specific population. All participants provided informed consent before beginning the questionnaire following the ethical principles. The questionnaire contained a series of declarations structured using the Likert scale, which is widely known as a psychometric tool to measure individuals’ subjective perceptions and attitudes (Likert, 1932). The Likert scale is recommended in research that aims to evaluate subjective experiences and psychosocial phenomena because it

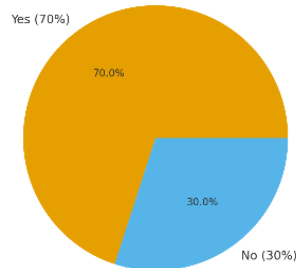
offers categorizing response gradients in a standardized and interpreted manner (Joshi et al., 2015). The data were collected by an online platform and were exported for visual and numerical analysis. Since this study aimed for a descriptive approach, the results are presented through visual graphics that offer a clear distribution of the responses. The analysis of the results was focused on interpreting dominant response tendencies of the answers, with the aim of identifying perceptions related to the emotional and mental impact of participation in dramatic activities, discussing the interpretive value of response-pattern analysis in Likert-type scales (Jebb et al., 2021).

3. RESULTS

In this section, the data collected through the interview are presented, structured on questions built using the Likert scale, which aims to value the impact of dramatic activities on the emotional and mental health of the participants. The Likert scale, first conceptualized by Likert (1932), represents a well-established psychometric structure for measuring attitudes.

Figure 1 shows that a major part of those interviewed, 70%, have participated in dramatic experiences, while a smaller part, 30%, report a lack of experience in this field.

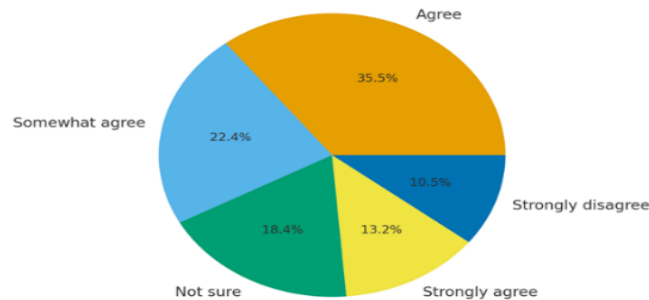
Have you ever participated in dramatic activities (acting, improvisation, role-play, theatre audience)?



Source: Author's own survey data (2025)

Figure 2 shows that the majority of participants agree (35.5%) or somewhat agree (22.4%), that dramatic activities help them express suppressed emotions. Additionally, 18.4% of those interviewed are unsure and 10.5% strongly disagree.

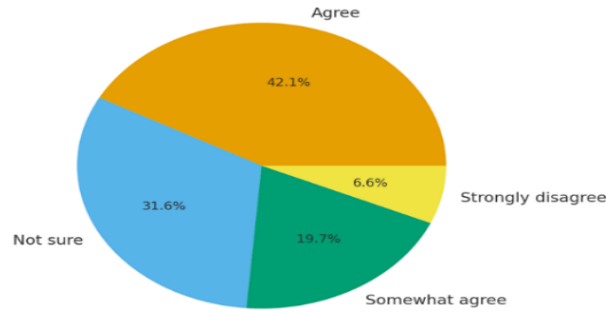
Participation in dramatic activities helps me express emotions I usually suppress.



Source: Author's own survey data (2025)

Figure 3 shows that a major part of the subjects agree (42.1%) that participation in dramatic activities helps them feel connected with themselves. A considerable percentage (31.6%) are unsure. Meanwhile, 19.7% somewhat agree, indicating partial benefit. Additionally, 6.6% strongly disagree with the statement.

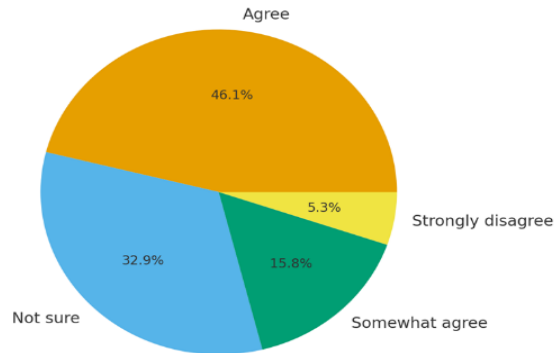
I feel more connected to myself after participating in dramatic activities.



Source: Author's own survey data (2025)

Figure 4 results show that the majority of participants (46.1%) agree that participation in dramatic activities helps reduce anxiety levels. Additionally, (32.9%) are unsure, while 15.8% somewhat agree, indicating a low level of benefit. Only 5.3% of participants strongly disagree that dramatic activities reduce feelings of anxiety.

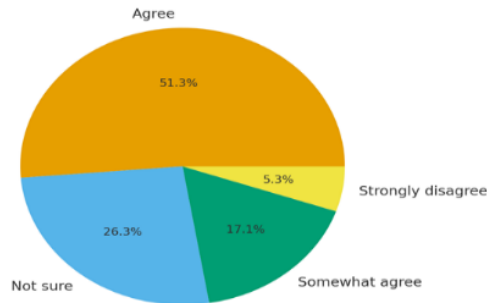
Participation in dramatic activities helps reduce feelings of anxiety.



Source: Author's own survey data (2025)

Figure 5 shows that more than half of the participants (51.3%) agree that they experience catharsis during or after dramatic activities. A considerable proportion (26.3%) are unsure, meanwhile 17.1% somewhat agree with the statement. Additionally, 5.3% of participants disagree.

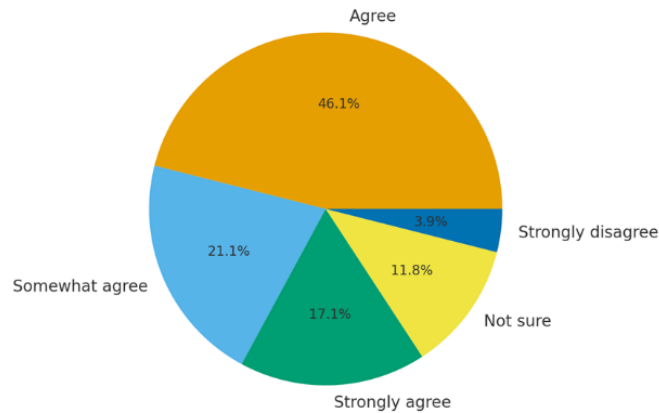
I experience catharsis (emotional release and cleansing) during or after dramatic activities.



Source: Author's own survey data (2025)

Figure 6 shows that the majority of those interviewed (46.1%) agree that dramatic activities improve empathy and understanding of others. The percentage of participants that somewhat agree is 21.1%, and those who strongly agree is 17.1%. Meanwhile, 11.8% are unsure and 3.9% strongly disagree.

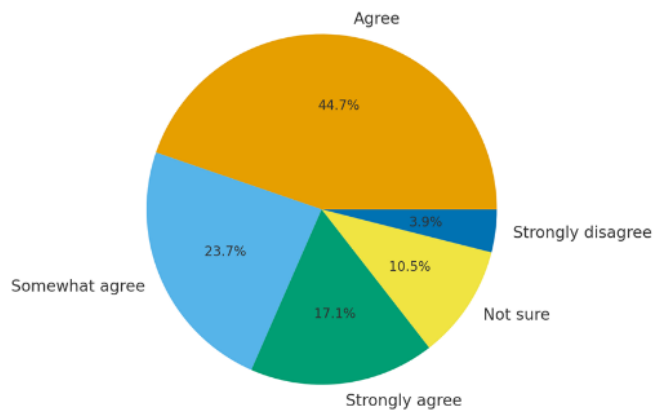
Dramatic activities promote empathy and understanding toward others.



Source: Author's own survey data (2025)

Figure 7 shows that the majority of participants (44.7%) agree that after participating in dramatic activities they feel emotionally relieved or mentally clearer. The percentage of those who strongly agree is 17.1% and those who somewhat agree is 23.7%. Meanwhile, 10.5% are unsure and 3.9% strongly disagree.

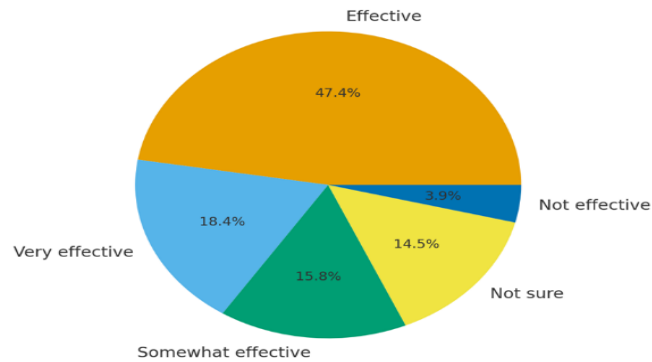
After dramatic activities I feel emotionally relieved or mentally clearer.



Source: Author's own survey data (2025)

Figure 8 shows that majority of participants value dramatic activities as effective in improving mental health (47.4%). The percentage of those who consider drama as very effective is 18.4% and somewhat effective is 15.8%. Meanwhile 14.5% are unsure, and 3.9% think that drama is not effective in improving mental health.

How effective do you consider drama in improving mental health?



Source: Author's own survey data (2025)

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that participants have a high level of exposure to dramatic activities, which creates an important basis for the manners in which they evaluate the emotional and psychological effects of those experiences. This exposure can explain the dominant tendency for positive responses. The participants who have not participated in dramatic activities represent an important source of variation, suggesting the necessity for differential approaches for different individual experiences. One of the notable trends is the perception of drama in facilitating emotional expression. The results show that participants perceive the dramatic activities as an environment that facilitates suppressed emotional expressions and showing inner thoughts. This aligns with framework research that identifies drama as an expressive space that enhances emotional reflection and affective regulation (Jiang et al., 2023). The portion of the unsure could be connected with lack of previous experience or the difficulty of emotional reflections. Another important dimension of the results aligns with self-connection. Participants report that dramatization helps increase sensitivity to their inner experiences and creates space for self-reflection. However, a part of the participants are unsure; that could reflect challenges of evaluating introspective processes that traditionally are considered subjective and complex. Results show that dramatization is valued as a mechanism that helps in reducing anxiety. Participants perceive dramatic activities as a process that helps in expressing emotions and improving psychological and emotional state. This aligns with Aristotle's concept of catharsis that expresses dramatic experience as a relief process. A consistent finding across all figures is the role of drama in increasing empathy and social sensitivity. Participants consider dramatization as a process that helps take the perspective of another, facilitating emotional interaction. This discussion highlights the importance of dramatic activities in psycho-emotional well-being and suggests that dramatization may play an important role in supportive interventions outside of formal clinical settings.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aims to understand how individuals perceive the impact of dramatic activities on their emotional and mental health. The results of the study showed that participants in the questionnaire, value those activities as experiences that help them in expressing emotions, increasing awareness, and reducing levels of anxiety by creating emotional clarity aligning with an existing framework that considers drama as a supportive space for emotional processing. Although some participants showed insecurity in valuing some experiences, this may be related to their level of exposure toward dramatic activities and with the subjective nature of emotional processes. The results show that dramatization can have a very supportive role in emotional and mental well-being and could be used as a supportive setting in everyday contexts not only in clinical settings. In general the results enhance the importance of dramatic activities as safe spaces for expression and reflection, creating real opportunities for improving the emotional and mental state of individuals.

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