

# A Theoretical Framework for Drama Therapy as Psychosocial Scaffolding

*Resilience and Coping in Lesotho's Orphaned Adolescents*

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## ABSTRACT

Orphaned adolescents in HIV-affected communities in Southern Africa face profound psychosocial challenges, with existing support structures often overburdened. Lesotho, with one of the highest HIV prevalence rates globally, presents a critical context where conventional mental health interventions are scarce. This necessitates innovative, culturally resonant approaches to foster resilience. This article constructs a novel theoretical framework positioning drama therapy as a form of psychosocial scaffolding. It aims to theorise how structured dramatic processes can specifically enhance resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms among the affected adolescent population in Lesotho. The framework is developed through a synthesis of interdisciplinary literature, including community psychology, resilience theory, and performative arts therapy. Concepts are contextualised within the socio-cultural fabric of Basotho society, analysing existing community dynamics and indigenous support systems. The framework proposes that drama therapy functions through three core mechanisms: symbolic externalisation of trauma, rehearsal of future selves, and the creation of a provisional 'as-if' community. A central theme is the transformation of communal narratives from those of loss to agency, with the 'scaffolding' being gradually removed as internal resources solidify. Drama therapy is theorised as a potent, culturally adaptable modality for psychosocial support. The framework provides a structured lens for understanding its potential to build sustainable resilience by leveraging communal and narrative strengths inherent to the setting. Future research should empirically test this framework through community-based participatory action projects. Programme designers and policymakers are urged to integrate such arts-based, non-stigmatising approaches into national adolescent health and social protection strategies. drama therapy, psychosocial scaffolding, resilience, orphaned adolescents, HIV/AIDS, Lesotho, theoretical framework, coping mechanisms This article provides the first dedicated theoretical model linking drama therapy to resilience-building for orphaned adolescents in a Basotho context, offering a novel mechanism for understanding how performative practice can scaffold psychosocial development.

**Keywords:** *Drama therapy, Psychosocial support, Resilience, Southern Africa, Orphaned adolescents, HIV/AIDS, Coping mechanisms*

### Article Highlights

- Proposes drama therapy as culturally resonant psychosocial scaffolding for orphaned adolescents.
- Identifies three core mechanisms: symbolic externalisation, rehearsal of future selves, and 'as-if' community.
- Contextualises theory within Basotho society's socio-cultural fabric and indigenous support systems.
- Advocates for integrating arts-based approaches into national adolescent health strategies.

### Core Theoretical Contribution

This article constructs the first dedicated theoretical model linking drama therapy to resilience-building for orphaned adolescents in a Basotho context, offering a novel framework for understanding how performative practice scaffolds psychosocial development.

*A conceptual model for culturally adaptive psychosocial intervention.*



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