

## THEATER WORKSHOPS AS A THERAPEUTIC DEVICE IN PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE CENTERS OF SERIDÓ POTIGUAR- BRAZIL

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Highlights: (1) The art emerges as an innovative therapeutic proposal in mental health. (2) The theater contributes to cognitive development and interpersonal skills. (3) Therefore the therapeutic effect, the theater acts in social inclusion.

PRE-PROOF

(as accepted)

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To identify the users of psychosocial Care Centers perception about theater workshops in their treatments. **Methodology:** Qualitative study. Twelve users participated to the study, belonging to theater groups offered in two towns of Seridó Potiguar. The data were collected by semi-structured interview between the months of August and October in 2019. The analysis occurred using the IRAMUTEQ software (*Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires*). In this article are presented two of the three built categories derived from the findings: the dimension from the mental disorder of the theater perspective; talking and acting freely: the changes in life after the theater. **Results:** According to the analysis, the categories evoke the theater paper in the comprehension of mental disorder, its contributions to in the recognition and management of symptoms, the skills and social interaction perception and development being a way that produces new life conceptions, ally to the fight against mental health stigma and marginalization. **Conclusion:** the users realize the theater as a valid therapy, exemplifying the transformations occurred in their lives after the participation in the workshops.

**Keywords:** Art therapy. Mental health. Group Practice. Mental Health Services.

### INTRODUCTION

During decades, the treatment aimed to people with mental disorders was based in social exclusion, medicalization and practices such as lobotomy, electroconvulsive therapy and isolation in solitaires. Social and political movements emerged worldwide, demanding changes in the treatment and conception of madness, defending the person as a holistic being and not only the carrier of a disease that needs a cure<sup>1,2</sup>.

The Psychiatric Reform that began with diverse experiences and proposals in times and distinct spaces, is based on breaking the stereotype surrounding madness, deconstructing and reaffirming that madness is not confined or excluded from social life<sup>3</sup>. The milestone of the anti-asylum in Brazil was the law 10.216 of 2001, reaffirming the Psychiatric Reform precepts, objecting the progressive reduction of psychiatric beds and barring the opening of new

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psychiatric hospitals. It was yet included the creation of substitute services to the hospital and programs to give support to those patients that were socially helpless<sup>4</sup>.

The substitutes services' mission where the Psychosocial Attention Center (CAPS) is the main representative, is to supply a new reality to the people with mental disorder, ensuring the preservation of human rights, rehabilitation and social reinsertion contemplating the subjectivity of the subject and the decentralization of drug treatment, a philosophy aligned to the Unified Health System (SUS)<sup>5</sup>, making available therapeutic proposals on cultural, artistic, work, and leisure proposals, whit the family/user protagonism<sup>6</sup>.

Considering the psychosocial proposal; the art, culture and the work operates on the breaking of psychiatrics paradigms, stimulating the person with metal disorder to look for a new reality, getting away from the social borders that they were put<sup>2</sup>. The cultural-artistic movement follows the reformist ideas: those with mental disorder passes from diagnoses to a protagonist, spokesperson of a cause, a fight for visibility and equal rights. It is not only a therapeutic proposal, but a way of creativity and expressiveness emerge, bringing cultured skills to the reality<sup>7</sup>.

Using the art as a therapeutic way, is possible to detect the unconscious off the individual, that which was not capable of being expressed through words and, from what was made, recognize the emotional and experiential load from who finds itself in psychic suffer<sup>8</sup>. The art is a potential way to become the knowledgeable entirely, complete on your essence.

Between the artistic manifestations, the theater won space as a therapeutic proposal on the mental health field, given to its capacity to work on innumerable possibility on the body, space, logic and improvise. Innumerable relations between actor and writer, actor and character, between the actors, and with the audience are established. It's informative paper goes through the words on the script: the actor is the responsible for giving the life to the text, introducing on the interpretation it's critical reading and dynamics of the descript person and the context criated<sup>9</sup>.

The Theater of the Oppressed (TO), one of the diverse expressions in the theater, it is marked by it's political-social bias, being an instrument for demanding rights, problematizing and raising questions about existing inequities, which is in line with the proposal for Psychiatric Reform. It is, therefore, a proposal of therapeutical potentiality, being necessary, to this

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purpose, to be applied by an experienced professional in TO<sup>10</sup>. Considering the theater as a therapeutic disposal the object is, in this study, identify the CAPS user perception above theaters workshops in its treatment.

### METHOD

A Qualitative Research developed with theater groups, Amorarte group and Iluminarte group, belonged to the CAPS of two municipalities at Seridó Potiguar, Rio Grande do Norte. The qualitative approach allows the capture of the meanings of the theater experience by the groups participants<sup>11</sup>. During the study time, five users composed the theater Group “Amorarte”: the “Iluminarte” group had 12 users.

To participate on the research, it was elected and an inclusion criteria the participation of, at least, a month on the theater workshops owing to be the minimum time to the therapeutic adaptation. Exclusion criteria was made to 18 years old minors and those who presented the cognitive capacity harmed, that is, that prevented to answer the interview questions, because of the medications or the diagnoses of mental health.

After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 12 users were eligible to participate on the research. The initial contact with the users was made during the activities developed by the groups. The researcher, at an individual way in a private room, talked to the users to present the research and explain the Free and Informed Consent Term (TCLE).

The data collected happened between July to October in 2019, and used an semi-structured interview to obtain data, made by the researchers. The interviews happened on the mentioned services, applied by the researcher, undergraduate in nursing at the time that had experience in participating in theater groups. The interviews average duration was of nine minutes; they were recorded by a smartphone to later transcription by the researcher herself.

The data collected were prepared in two steps; first, it was organized the information collected on the characterization of the research participants, in a descriptive way, on the software *Microsoft Office Excel 2013* spreadsheet. Posteriorly, the interview data were transformed in a written set named *corpus*, submitted to the *software* free analysis Iramuteq (*Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires*), used on the Human and Social Science to statistically analyses textual subjects<sup>12</sup>.

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The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee in the State University of Rio Grande do Norte (CEP/UERN), on June 7th 2019, legal view nº 3.378.260, respecting the resolution recommendations 466/12<sup>13</sup>. All the involved participated on a spontaneous way, after clarification about the research and the TCLE signature.

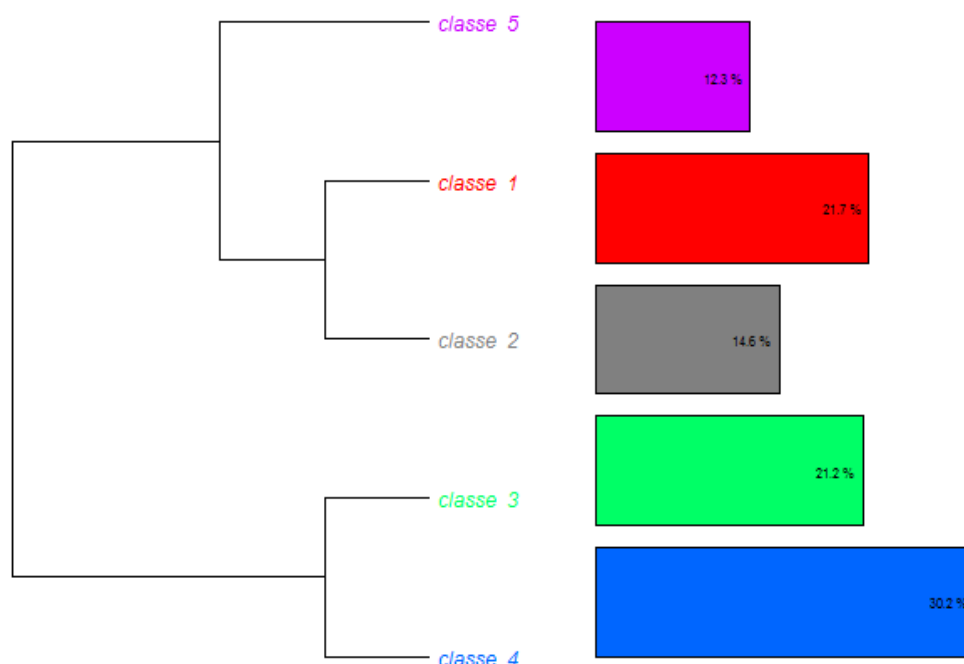
### RESULTS

Between the research participants, the feminine sex predominated (58,3%); the average time in workshop participation was 7,5 years. About the age, the average time was of 53, 8 years, the youngest being 40 years old and the oldest 75 years old.

The *corpus* processed in Iramuteq obtained an utilization of 82,81%, considering an ideal number to the use of data generated by the *software*, with 212 followed analyzed texts. Five classes were generated from the Descendent Hierarchical Classification (Figure 1), that represents the speak disposition and the interaction between them. The Class 1 corresponded to 21,7% of the analyzed *corpus*; The Class 2, to 14,62%; the class 3, to 21,23%; the class 4, to 30,19%; and the class 5 to 12,26%. Jointly, after the analysis matrix of the corpus by the *software*, created a Correspondence Factorial Analysis (AFC), a result of the crossing between the words and the classes, presenting a proximity or diverge between them.

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**Figure 1.** Classes generated from the descendent hierarchical Classification (CHD), Caicó/RN, 2019.



**Source:** Research data.

Based on the classes indicated by the CHD, analysis categories were created according to the content and interpretation of the text segments of each class (Table 1). These were selected based on the significance level of association between the words and the class ( $p < 0.05$ ), and on a frequency higher than the threshold obtained by dividing the number of text segments (N.O) by the number of distinct forms (N.F), multiplied by 2:  $(9073 / 1556) \times 2 = 11.712$ . This expression allows the selection of the most frequently mentioned and statistically significant words in the classes.

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**Table one.** Categorial System from the CHD and AFC, Caicó/RN, 2019.

Words	Categories	Classes
To present	Category 1 – Life in action: the art of present yourself and its significance	4
Mental Health problems	Category 2 – Dimension of mental disorder from the perspective of theater	3
Shyness Sadness Change	Category 3 – Talk and act freely: the changes of life after theater	5, 2 and 1

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

This work presents a selection of the obtained results, focusing on categories 2 and 3, which were derived from classes 5, 2, and 1, respectively. In order to enrich the discussion, the participants' statements are presented *in natura*, highlighting and valuing their unique forms of expression. Additionally, interpretations are provided for each participant's contribution.

## DISCUSSION

### Dimension of mental disorder from the theater perception

The users reported that, after entering on the theater group, they could have a new perspective about their mental health problems:

I think I get better, I have never had any alteration of anything, I did not alter, never got hospitalized [...] after I entered here I got better (Interview 1).

It got better. I have depression [...] but the theater, the treatment that I take medicine, I do the treatments correctly, [...] I participate correctly and feel fine, you know? I feel good (Interview 5).

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[...] it is a problem there. Today, today I feel a strengthened person. I have [...] schizophrenia problem, (after that, I started on the theater) that was overcoming (Interview 6).

It is getting better each day. Well, I have a tumor in my head that cannot be operated, and I have some “tremor”, I have some severe nervous crises [...], so I am keeping on the theater to keep myself alive, because I have already tried a lot of suicides [...] I dropped my life into the theater, so my life is in the theater, for while it lasts (Interview 9)

After years of exclusion and unawareness about their own health condition, the participants of this therapeutic proposal begin to discover new possibilities of life, comprehending that they are not limited to theirs. This limited thought it is given by the stigma of mental health that roots on the subject in such a Strong way that prevents it from seeing who it is and what it can do, both in its Family role and in the coletivity.<sup>14</sup>

The art open ways to the social and emotional development <sup>15</sup>. The involvement on the theater creative process allows that the person transcend the imaginary to the reality. The senses become sharpener allowing the production of a new knowledge about itself. When stimulated to realize who they are beyond the mental disorder, they reach a new step of recognizing their problems and realizing the transformations that happened after the theater.

By its capacity of allying creation, playfulness, expression and self-knowledge, the theater allows to their participants an emancipation about its bodies and about its health problems in mental disorder. Therefore, the protagonist in therapeutic pass to the own user, making them capable of makings choice for their treatment.

The art-therapy acts as a ways of resignification of the events experienced by the subjects with a mental disorder<sup>16</sup>. Being in a protected and free of prejudice place, the subject finds, through a proposal of artistic manifestation, materials to express what he lived, but with a new sense, transforming what affected him negatively in a resilience event.

Still in this category, the interviewed demonstrated to recognize the therapeutic effectiveness in theater, visualizing the medicated treatment, which continues to perform, after they acquire to this therapeutic proposal:



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[...] I had two types of medicine and today I only have one. After I got into the group, I am only having one. So, I think I got better, I think that worked as a therapy (Interview 3).

I feel happy in therapy [...] look; it is a therapy that helps me a lot is the theater. After I enter the group I see better (my problem is of mental health) [...] I have four types of medicine [...] I want that get better, I need that it get better (Interview 10).

I see that is getting better, right? I am feeling very well after I have been through. [...] I believe that if I kept the way I was, today I would be having a lot of medicines (Interview 11)

The art acts on the emotional development and as a supporter to get back on daily activities. When investigates the art-therapy on the Elder treatment against depression, it was found that those who, those that acquire in artistic workshops in their treatments, presented a decrease on their depressive and anxious symptoms, what improve of their self-stem and interpersonal relations<sup>17</sup>. In fact, people who acquire the art as a therapeutic disposal, presented improve and reduction on their symptoms.

The therapeutic potential of the artistic activities it is not limited only on the health recovery, it goes forward in the actions of promotions and prevention. When joining the art in the therapeutic process, the subject feels more welcomed because it has its particularities respected, getting to open to proposals and express strength that keep for themselves for a long time ahead all the historic of marginalization<sup>18</sup>.

Patients coming from asylums presented the marks left by psychotropic ways used irrationally for chemical contention and a failed try to “heal the madness”. Many patients does not know the therapeutic function of medicines that they have, or even of their side effects<sup>19</sup>. To ally new therapeutic disposals to the treatment, for example the theater, allows decreasing the effects caused by the dependency in psychotropic and sequelae left by them.

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### **To talk and act freely: the changes of life after the theater**

The category presenter and homogeneity on the user's speech about changes happened in their lives after acquiring the theater as a therapy. Many reported that they became opposite people comparing to who they were before the workshops:

The only thing I have to say is that it is everything to me! To be participating on the theater was wonderful to me. I am so good after I entered on the theater. I am another person, but to better. Got it? (Interview 8).

[...] Today I take care of the house; I take care of my mother. The theater helped me a lot, I grew up, I evolve [...] I was a total isolated person, you know? [...] I thought that nothing was going to be good, nothing was going to change. Today, today I woke up, right? [...] I learned to love the life! (Interview 6).

[...] I got closer to the group, to the people, to the own users, I passed to know more (Interview 3)

I changed a lot, I was happier like this. My heart got happier! (Interview 2).

The participation in artistic workshops allow the users to see new perspectives of life. The theater involves new constructive steps where in which one is possible to access new experiences. It is about a constant process of creativity and each participant lives it in a particular way, developing their own abilities that will reverberate in their relations with the environment and their social identities <sup>20</sup>.

CAPS is the free expression. Environment for them, a meet place between the mental disorder and the resilience of transgressing the segregation. Between the therapeutic proposals, the user must feel free to choose what attracts him<sup>21</sup>. On many users understanding, CAPS it is shaped as a new Family, where the members understand and accept their peculiarities.

The feeling of belonging to a therapeutic group <sup>22</sup> is good to a person with a mental disorder to give opportunity to share the anguish, to work the mental health in a perspective not stigmatizing, promoting health without major technological devices and in a democratic environment, which transcends just the clinical view. Being in a group where the members feel free to share their stories, free of value judgment, conducive the development in communication abilities, strengthening the bonds and constructing the knowledge.

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In the participants speech, the changes occurred in their lives are visible, above all, when they express the conquest of independency in getting back to the activities, they had lost the interest or that did not bring pleasure to them anymore; in resilience of fears and insecurities and, mainly, in recognizing that, for more that a person has a mental disorder, this does not stop them of having a life and accomplish actions like any other human being.

It is guaranteed to everyone the autonomy and participation in all and any procedure that comes to be accomplished. There is a complexity behind the mental disorders, but it is necessary that, peering and watching the particularities of each case, the person participate of the decision process of their treatment guaranteeing the best treatment and that respect the human dignity<sup>23</sup>. The desire expressed of participating in any of the cultural activities provided as therapies on the substitutive services is important that the benefits of this are embraced.

Between the points observed by the participants of this research, the resilience of sadness is evocated because of the participation on the theater and its adjacent workshops.

[...] I know I was Always sad, crying [...] after I entered here I got better, I did not talk to anyone [...] I learned with theater and with CAPS (Interview 1).

[...] I used to get sad, quiet, did not think about life, only thinking nonsense things. I did not do anything (with the theater). Then I got very happy, my heart was happier (Interview 2).

[...] Before the theater, right? Before the CAPS exist, I was depressive, Always crying, I tried suicide before, you know? I see the theater today as a life improvement (Interview 8).

The adherence to the art therapy presents improvement on the negative feelings and de suicidal ideation. There is a relation between the art and the side effects caused by the anxiety<sup>24</sup>. As the activities occur, the user develop cognitive abilities, many present themselves as more communicative, happy and confident.

During the interviews was possible to analyze, empirically, the user satisfaction in being members of their theater groups. Those with more years of therapeutic reported the return of joy related to the bond between the participants, with the responsible professionals and with the involvement and public recognizing.

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Nise da Silveira<sup>25</sup> got to observe, in the works idealized by her patients, the emotions flooding in the interior of their unconscious to the screens. Those who did not show the interpersonal communication abilities, put in their creation the locked suffer, giving voice to the silenced. A rich of expressiveness environment, the art therapy embarks on a search to transform sadness and uncertainty in a desire to be better and look what brings you happiness.

Concomitant to behavior changes, the user reported the advances in social interaction through the shyness overcoming:

I like participating on the theater because I see it as a therapy, you know? [...] it took a little of my shyness that I Always had [...] In the time of the presentation I feel safe, sometimes before entering I feel nervous, but this is something that is part of it, right? But, after all passes, then I end feeling good (Interview 5).

The theater is of a great importance, because in theater I could reveal myself to shyness, I was a very shy person, such a poor [...] Today I am Strong, and this strength made me feel today and can be saying this [...] The group give me strength (Interview 6).

[...] I was very shy, thank God my shyness got over a little bit [...] Thank to God it helped a lot, I think that talking, talking and memorize a play and go to a public present. (Interview 7).

For more that the nervousness of going to the stage still exists, the experience of the spectacle is liberating to the people that revealed to suffer with the shyness for many years. During the interviews, the shyness factor was not seem, because everyone showed security and dynamicity during the conversations, which demonstrates the user's development inside the workshops.

The exercises practiced before the rehearsals as, for example, stretching and breathing practices make the participants reconnect with their bodies, elevating the ways of communication. In a study about the benefits of the theater<sup>26</sup>, according to the participants, the theater is face as a way of resilience of shyness, a mean to the developing and/or reconstruction of the self-esteem and the identity.

In another state, the theater represented a strategy of health education in a waiting room, with promotion practices to health in basic attention. For using the language and daily situations

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next to the user's reality, the use of the theater is a strong instrument that evolves a health team and users<sup>27</sup>.

Interacting with the audience and, further, performing activities extra walls of CAPS, the person with mental disorder get their space back in the society, this time with their own voice to guarantee their rights<sup>28</sup>. Even the communication established between the actor's look and the audience is capable of reaching expressive meanings, because the look who admire encourages and give strength to make their freedom echoes.

No one is born shy. This one and as other feelings has its origins in the precipitate judgment, in the exclusion to who looks different and, it is a lot related to mental health, on the negative stigma to which our society is it, historically, substantiate.

For this reason is necessary that the workshop environment be therapeutic, this is, be substantiate as a democratic space, free of pre-judgment and liable to establish connections between their members. Everyone should have their rights of expression. Guaranteed and together they can share their wishes, experiences, dreams and achievements<sup>29</sup>.

The findings of this research presented as significates to the therapeutic apply of theater. Nonetheless, it is considered as a limitation the lack of an integrative review of the bibliography in an expressive number of data bases, as a low theoretical framework found about the theater applied on the health, making the discussion of the findings more referent to the art therapy than to the own theater. This limitation evidence the importance of new studies that address the theater as a therapeutic disposal in mental health.

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The perception of users that added to the theater in their treatments reflects that the proposal emerges as an innovative instrument in the cognitive development; in the rediscovery of individual potentialities; in the interpersonal relations; in the social inclusion and in an educational mean. Identified on the participants speech changes about the perception of the diagnoses in mental health, the better on the negative feelings and overcoming of shyness.

The study object is still relative unknown in the national literature, making it difficult new scientific materials. However, the research promoted the deepening and approximation

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with the existent Works about the applicability of art in the therapeutic projects in mental health, beyond opening an opportunity to contribute with new knowledges in this field.

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