

Comparing the Efficacy of Transactional Analysis-Based Group Counseling and Psychodrama on Social Self-Empowerment among Children of Divorce

Nasrin. Asadi Khezerlou¹, Amir. Panah Ali^{1*}, Shahram. Vahedi², Naeimeh. Moheb³

¹ Department of Psychology and Counseling, Ta.C., Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

² Department of Educational Sciences, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran

³ Department of Clinical Psychology, Ta.C., Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: Panahali@iau.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to compare the efficacy of Transactional Analysis-based group counseling and psychodrama in improving social self-empowerment among female adolescents from divorced families.

Methods and Materials: This quasi-experimental study employed a pretest-posttest control-group design with a two-week follow-up. The statistical population consisted of female senior high school students aged 15–17 years from divorced families in Ajabshir, Iran, during the 2023–2024 academic year. Using purposive sampling, 36 eligible students were selected and randomly assigned to Transactional Analysis, psychodrama, and control groups, with 12 participants in each group. The experimental groups received nine 90-minute intervention sessions twice weekly, whereas the control group received no intervention. Social self-empowerment was assessed using the Social Competence Questionnaire. Data were analyzed in SPSS using analysis of covariance and Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons.

Findings: After controlling for pretest scores, the group effect on posttest social self-empowerment was statistically significant, $F(2, 32)=25.375$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.613$. Bonferroni comparisons showed that both Transactional Analysis ($MD=1.153$, $p<0.001$) and psychodrama ($MD=0.669$, $p<0.001$) produced significantly greater improvements than the control condition. Moreover, Transactional Analysis resulted in a significantly greater increase in social self-empowerment than psychodrama ($MD=0.484$, $SE=0.149$, $p=0.008$).

Conclusion: Both Transactional Analysis-based group counseling and psychodrama were effective in enhancing social self-empowerment among female adolescents from divorced families; however, Transactional Analysis demonstrated superior efficacy. These findings support the implementation of structured school-based group counseling interventions to strengthen interpersonal competence, social agency, and adaptive functioning among adolescents affected by parental divorce.

Keywords: Transactional Analysis, Psychodrama, Social Self-Empowerment, Children of Divorce, Group Counseling

1. Introduction

Divorce is among the most consequential transitions in family life because it restructures not only the marital relationship but also the emotional, relational, and developmental environment in which children grow. Although divorce may be an adaptive solution to chronic marital conflict in some families, its consequences for children can be substantial when the transition is accompanied by conflict, disrupted parenting, changes in residence or schooling, economic instability, reduced contact with one parent, or persistent interparental tension. For adolescents in particular, parental divorce may occur during a developmental period already characterized by identity formation, heightened emotional sensitivity, increasing autonomy, and greater dependence on peer acceptance and social belonging. Consequently, adolescents from divorced families may face an accumulation of developmental and contextual stressors that can influence their beliefs about themselves, others, relationships, trust, and social participation. Research on children of divorce has increasingly emphasized that the adverse effects of divorce are not confined to transient emotional distress but can extend to maladaptive beliefs, interpersonal insecurity, reduced social functioning, and difficulties adjusting to new family structures. Interventions specifically designed for children and families experiencing divorce have therefore focused on modifying problematic cognitions, strengthening coping resources, and facilitating adaptive adjustment during and after family transition (Ahmadi et al., 2026). Qualitative evidence from the Iranian context also indicates that divorce may create multilayered psychological, relational, social, and family-level consequences, underscoring the need for interventions that address not only individual distress but also changes in interpersonal functioning and perceived social agency (Hajiheydari et al., 2026). Moreover, children affected by parental separation may experience restricted opportunities to express their preferences, concerns, and emotional needs, particularly when family conflict becomes centered on adult disputes rather than the child's developmental interests. Such dynamics can weaken children's perceived participation, voice, and sense of control in family relationships (Morrison et al., 2020). These concerns are particularly important during adolescence, when social relationships become central to self-definition and psychological adjustment. For this reason, interventions that strengthen adolescents' capacity to communicate effectively, understand

interpersonal situations, regulate emotional responses, maintain constructive relationships, and act with confidence in social settings may be especially valuable for children of divorce.

One construct that is highly relevant to this developmental and family context is social self-empowerment, which can be understood as an individual's perceived and enacted capacity to function effectively in interpersonal and social environments through adaptive emotional, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral skills. Social self-empowerment overlaps conceptually with social competence, interpersonal self-efficacy, emotional regulation, social problem-solving, and the ability to initiate and maintain constructive interactions. Adolescents with stronger social competence are generally better able to interpret interpersonal cues, regulate responses during conflict, assert needs appropriately, sustain supportive peer relationships, and adapt to challenging social situations. These abilities can be particularly protective for adolescents experiencing family disruption, because parental divorce may increase uncertainty and emotional reactivity while simultaneously reducing the stability of familiar relational patterns. Evidence from school-based intervention research suggests that social competence is modifiable and can be strengthened through structured psychological and educational programs. For example, interventions targeting students' social and moral capacities have been shown to improve social competence in populations exposed to interpersonal difficulties such as bullying, indicating that social functioning can respond meaningfully to systematic intervention (Solhjoui et al., 2026). More broadly, intervention research across childhood and adolescence has demonstrated that social-emotional and cognitive skills can improve in response to structured programs, although the magnitude and persistence of intervention effects may vary according to program characteristics, developmental stage, implementation quality, and follow-up duration (Hart et al., 2024). These findings support the importance of identifying interventions that not only produce short-term improvement but also directly address the interpersonal and self-regulatory processes underlying social functioning. Among adolescents from divorced families, approaches that combine interpersonal learning, emotional awareness, behavioral rehearsal, and revision of dysfunctional relational patterns may therefore be particularly suitable for promoting social self-empowerment.

Transactional Analysis (TA) represents one such approach because it provides a structured framework for

understanding personality organization, interpersonal communication, emotional reactions, and recurring relationship patterns. TA conceptualizes human functioning through ego states commonly described as Parent, Adult, and Child and emphasizes the ways in which transactions between these states can produce either adaptive communication or recurrent interpersonal conflict. Within group counseling, TA enables participants to identify their habitual modes of interaction, recognize maladaptive scripts and injunctions, examine psychological games, and replace rigid or reactive patterns with more autonomous and Adult-centered responses. Contemporary models of TA group therapy emphasize that change can occur through the integration of cognitive understanding, emotional insight, relational experience, and repeated examination of interpersonal transactions within the group setting (Tangolo & Massi, 2018). The evidence-based conceptual literature on TA further suggests that its theoretical components are linked to clinically relevant mechanisms such as self-awareness, relational functioning, autonomy, affect regulation, and restructuring of maladaptive beliefs, thereby supporting its potential usefulness as a coherent psychotherapeutic model (Vos & van Rijn, 2021). A distinctive strength of TA is that it translates complex interpersonal processes into accessible concepts that adolescents can learn and apply in everyday situations. Through recognizing whether communication is driven by a critical Parent, an adapted or impulsive Child, or a reality-oriented Adult state, adolescents may become better able to interrupt automatic reactions and make more deliberate interpersonal choices. This process may be especially relevant for children of divorce, whose relational experiences may have included conflict, inconsistent communication, blame, emotional withdrawal, or loyalty pressures that can become incorporated into maladaptive interpersonal scripts.

The use of TA in educational and counseling settings has received increasing empirical attention. A recent systematic review of TA-based group counseling in educational contexts concluded that the model has been used across a range of student concerns and may be particularly appropriate for improving interpersonal awareness, communication patterns, self-understanding, and adaptive psychological functioning in group settings (Prawitasari et al., 2026). More specifically, TA interventions have shown promise for adolescents experiencing psychosocial difficulties. Research with secondary-school students has demonstrated that TA can reduce psychosocial challenges by

helping adolescents understand their patterns of interaction, improve communication, and strengthen adaptive responses to social and emotional demands (Ayodeji et al., 2022). TA has also shown effects in adult relational contexts, with training influencing dimensions of marital intimacy and suggesting that modification of transactional patterns can meaningfully alter interpersonal closeness and relationship functioning (Javid et al., 2025). Although marital relationships differ from adolescent peer and school relationships, these findings reinforce the broader proposition that TA can modify relational processes rather than merely reduce isolated symptoms. In addition, contemporary TA has expanded beyond didactic analysis of transactions to include experiential and narrative techniques that facilitate emotional exploration and revision of self-narratives. Gopakumar's work on "story options," for example, illustrates how playful emotional exploration within a TA framework can enable individuals to reconstruct restrictive narratives and develop alternative meanings and behavioral possibilities (Gopakumar, 2021). Such mechanisms may be particularly valuable for adolescents from divorced families, who may internalize self-blaming narratives, expectations of abandonment, mistrust, or beliefs that conflict is inevitable. By identifying these scripts and replacing them with more flexible Adult-based perspectives, TA may contribute to greater social confidence, improved emotional control, and stronger perceived agency in relationships.

Psychodrama constitutes a second intervention approach with strong relevance to social self-empowerment because it is inherently experiential, relational, and action-oriented. Developed from Moreno's work, psychodrama uses structured dramatic enactment to help individuals explore emotions, interpersonal conflicts, social roles, and unresolved experiences within a supportive group environment. Rather than relying solely on verbal reflection, psychodrama invites participants to enact situations, exchange roles, observe themselves from different perspectives, and experiment with alternative responses. Core techniques such as role reversal, doubling, mirroring, future projection, and the empty chair can facilitate insight while simultaneously providing opportunities for behavioral rehearsal and emotional expression (Nolte, 2019). This emphasis on action may be especially useful for adolescents, who may find purely verbal or abstract forms of psychotherapy less engaging. Through enactment, adolescents can experience the perspective of another person, observe the interpersonal consequences of their

behavior, and practice more adaptive responses in a psychologically contained setting. Psychodrama also allows emotionally charged experiences to be externalized and symbolically reorganized, which may reduce avoidance and enhance emotional integration. In the context of parental divorce, adolescents may carry unexpressed anger, grief, guilt, loyalty conflicts, or fears of rejection that are difficult to articulate directly. Psychodramatic methods can create a structured space in which such experiences are represented, explored, and reframed through role-based interaction.

The therapeutic relevance of psychodrama for relational and trauma-related difficulties is supported by both theoretical and empirical work. Dayton's neuropsychodrama model integrates psychodramatic methods with trauma-informed and neuropsychological perspectives, emphasizing that experiential group processes can help individuals process relational trauma, regulate affect, and reconstruct interpersonal expectations (Dayton, 2015). While not every child of divorce experiences trauma in a clinical sense, exposure to chronic family conflict, abrupt separation, parental hostility, or relational disruption may create patterns of emotional hyperreactivity, mistrust, or avoidance that can be addressed through corrective relational experiences. Psychodrama has also been adapted specifically for adolescents through creative tools such as therapeutic masks, which provide a developmentally sensitive means of expressing difficult emotions, roles, and aspects of identity that may otherwise remain concealed (Pires et al., 2021). A systematic review focused on adolescent internalizing and externalizing problems found that psychodrama has been applied to a range of emotional and behavioral difficulties and may improve dimensions of self-expression, emotional processing, social functioning, and psychological adjustment (Ulusoy et al., 2023). Community-based research has further shown that psychodrama can be feasibly implemented with adolescents and young adults in diverse cultural settings and may contribute to mental health promotion through group cohesion, emotional expression, and strengthened interpersonal resources (Benoni et al., 2024). These findings are especially pertinent when considering school-based applications, where interventions must be sufficiently engaging, socially oriented, and adaptable to group delivery.

Recent evidence has also strengthened the empirical basis for psychodrama across different age groups and cultural settings. A systematic review of psychodrama interventions for children aged 4 to 12 reported beneficial effects across a range of psychological and behavioral outcomes, while also

highlighting heterogeneity in intervention structure and methodological quality (Özkan & Doğmuş, 2026). Although the developmental characteristics of younger children differ from those of adolescents, the findings suggest that action-based and role-oriented therapeutic procedures can be meaningfully adapted for younger populations. In older samples, a systematic review of psychodrama implementation and effectiveness concluded that psychodrama has been used across diverse clinical and nonclinical conditions and that the literature generally supports its therapeutic potential, particularly in relation to emotional expression, interpersonal functioning, and psychological well-being, while also pointing to variability in study designs and intervention protocols (Maya et al., 2025). Similarly, a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies based on Chinese samples found evidence that psychodrama can improve mental health outcomes, further suggesting that its effects are not limited to Western therapeutic contexts (Wang et al., 2024). Together, these findings provide a strong rationale for examining psychodrama among adolescents facing family-related psychosocial stress. Nevertheless, direct evidence concerning its effects specifically on social self-empowerment among children of divorce remains limited, and comparative studies against other theoretically distinct group interventions are especially scarce.

The potential effectiveness of both TA and psychodrama may also be understood through the broader principle that culturally and contextually responsive interventions are more likely to engage participants and produce meaningful change. Psychological interventions are not delivered in a social vacuum; participants interpret therapeutic concepts through family norms, cultural values, relational expectations, and community experiences. Research emphasizing culturally centered treatment has shown that interventions are strengthened when the perspectives, values, and lived realities of the target community are incorporated into treatment processes rather than treated as peripheral considerations (Hirschak et al., 2023). This principle is particularly relevant in work with adolescents from divorced families because meanings attached to divorce, parental roles, family reputation, gender expectations, and emotional disclosure can differ substantially across sociocultural contexts. In Iranian settings, where family cohesion and social perceptions of divorce may carry particular importance, female adolescents may experience complex pressures related to stigma, loyalty, privacy, and relational identity. Accordingly, group-based

approaches such as TA and psychodrama may offer different but complementary pathways for intervention. TA provides an explicit cognitive-relational vocabulary through which adolescents can reinterpret communication and relational patterns, while psychodrama offers an embodied and experiential context for exploring emotions, social roles, and alternative forms of interaction. Determining which approach produces stronger gains in social self-empowerment is therefore not only a question of intervention efficacy but also of identifying the mechanism and format that may best fit the needs of this population.

Despite increasing evidence supporting both modalities, an important gap remains in comparative intervention research. Many studies evaluate TA or psychodrama independently, often against no-treatment or routine-care conditions, making it difficult to determine their relative effectiveness when treatment intensity is held constant. This distinction is clinically meaningful because the two approaches differ in their primary mechanisms. TA is comparatively structured, interpretive, and cognitively organized, with emphasis on recognizing ego states, transactional patterns, scripts, injunctions, drivers, and psychological games. Psychodrama is more experiential, enactment-based, and affectively oriented, with emphasis on role experimentation, perspective-taking, emotional expression, behavioral rehearsal, and group interaction. Both could plausibly improve social self-empowerment, but they may do so through different pathways. TA may be especially effective when adolescents require greater cognitive clarity regarding dysfunctional relationship patterns and stronger skills for monitoring interpersonal reactions. Psychodrama may be especially effective when adolescents need opportunities to externalize emotions, rehearse social roles, and experience corrective interpersonal encounters. Comparative research is therefore needed to determine whether one model confers an advantage over the other in strengthening adolescents' social competence and perceived agency.

The need for such research is further reinforced by the heterogeneity of outcomes documented in psychosocial intervention studies. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that intervention effects on social-emotional skills can persist, fade, or vary considerably depending on the nature of the intervention and characteristics of the target population (Hart et al., 2024). Therefore, establishing that an intervention is generally beneficial is insufficient; research should also identify which approaches generate larger improvements under comparable conditions. This is

especially important for school counseling systems operating under limited time, personnel, and resource constraints, where selecting an intervention with stronger effects may have substantial practical value. For adolescents from divorced families, school-based group counseling is particularly advantageous because it can provide accessible support, normalize shared experiences, reduce isolation, and facilitate interpersonal learning among peers facing similar family transitions. The group format is also well suited to both TA and psychodrama: TA uses live transactions within the group as material for learning, whereas psychodrama depends fundamentally on group participation, role interaction, and interpersonal enactment. Moreover, specialized intervention programs for children of divorce have demonstrated that targeted psychosocial support can reduce maladaptive beliefs and promote healthier adjustment, suggesting that this population responds positively to structured intervention rather than simply requiring passive support or time for natural recovery (Ahmadi et al., 2026). Consequently, examining two established group modalities within the same study can contribute both to the literature on children of divorce and to evidence-based decision-making in school counseling.

Another important consideration is that adolescents' social self-empowerment may represent a particularly meaningful intervention target because it captures more than symptom reduction. An adolescent may experience fewer emotional problems yet still remain socially passive, uncertain, avoidant, or ineffective in interpersonal situations. Conversely, strengthening social self-empowerment may produce broader benefits by increasing the adolescent's ability to communicate needs, establish boundaries, seek support, manage disagreements, sustain peer relationships, and participate more confidently in school and family contexts. Such capacities are likely to be especially important after divorce, when young people may need to navigate changed relationships with parents, stepparents, siblings, peers, teachers, and other adults. From this perspective, TA and psychodrama both offer potentially powerful but theoretically distinct routes to empowerment. TA aims to increase autonomy by helping individuals understand and revise internalized relational patterns, while psychodrama seeks to expand spontaneity, role flexibility, emotional expression, and interpersonal creativity. Contemporary evidence supports the conceptual and clinical relevance of both models (Maya et al., 2025; Tangolo & Massi, 2018; Ulusoy et al., 2023; Vos & van Rijn, 2021), yet direct comparisons in adolescents from divorced families

remain uncommon. Addressing this gap may clarify whether structured cognitive-relational analysis or experiential role-based enactment is more effective for promoting adaptive social functioning in a vulnerable adolescent population.

Accordingly, the present study aimed to compare the effectiveness of Transactional Analysis-based group counseling and psychodrama in enhancing social self-empowerment among female adolescents from divorced families.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

The present study was applied in purpose and employed a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control-group design with two intervention groups and one control group. The statistical population comprised all female senior high school students aged 15 to 17 years from divorced families who were enrolled in schools in Ajab Shir County during the 2023–2024 academic year and were identifiable through school counseling records. Purposive, criterion-based sampling was used. After obtaining the required administrative permissions from the relevant university authorities and the Ajab Shir Department of Education, the researchers collaborated with education counseling experts and secondary-school counselors to review counseling records while maintaining strict confidentiality. Students who appeared to meet the eligibility criteria were invited to a confidential information session in which the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, voluntary nature of participation, and confidentiality provisions of the study were explained. Written informed consent was then obtained from both the participating students and their custodial parents. The inclusion criteria were being female and between 15 and 17 years of age; having experienced a legally finalized parental divorce, with approximately one to two years having elapsed since the divorce; having no documented history of severe psychiatric disorder or psychotropic medication use based on school health records and screening interviews; not participating concurrently in another counseling or psychotherapy program; and expressing willingness to participate with written consent from both the student and custodial parent. Exclusion criteria included absence from more than two intervention sessions without acceptable justification, voluntary withdrawal at any stage of the study, and the occurrence of an acute family, psychological, or medical crisis that could interfere with participation. Sample size was estimated using G*Power for

analysis of covariance, assuming a statistical power of 0.80, a Type I error rate of 0.05, and an effect size of 0.40. The resulting sample comprised 36 participants, who were randomly assigned by lottery to three equal groups of 12 participants: a Transactional Analysis-based group counseling group, a psychodrama group, and a control group. Before the interventions, all participants completed the pretest assessment of social self-empowerment. The two experimental groups then participated in nine 90-minute intervention sessions delivered twice weekly, whereas the control group received no intervention during the same period. The sessions were conducted in the hall of the Cultural Center of the Ajab Shir Department of Education. Immediately after completion of the intervention period, all three groups completed the posttest assessment under comparable conditions. The study procedures were implemented in accordance with established ethical principles for research involving human participants, including informed consent, confidentiality of personal information, voluntary participation, freedom to withdraw without penalty, avoidance of psychological harm, and adherence to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2. Measures

Social self-empowerment was assessed using the Social Competence Questionnaire developed by Parandin (2006). The instrument contains 47 items and was originally designed to assess several dimensions of social functioning, including behavioral skills, motivational predispositions and expectations, cognitive skills, and emotional competence. Although the questionnaire may be scored according to these subdimensions, in the present study it was used as a single-factor measure representing overall social self-empowerment. Participants responded to each item on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1, indicating strong disagreement, to 7, indicating strong agreement, with higher total scores reflecting greater social competence and social self-empowerment. Parandin (2006) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81 for the social empowerment dimension and supported the construct validity of the questionnaire through factor analysis, with the extracted factor structure accounting for approximately 67% of the variance. More recent research has also demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Solhjoui et al. (2026) reporting a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88. In the present study, internal consistency was again examined using Cronbach's alpha, and a coefficient of 0.78 was

obtained, indicating acceptable reliability for the study sample. The same instrument was administered before the interventions and again after the completion of the nine intervention sessions to enable evaluation of changes in social self-empowerment across the three study groups.

2.3. Interventions

The psychodrama intervention was developed and implemented based primarily on Nolte's (2019) psychodrama framework and was delivered across nine 90-minute sessions, twice weekly. The first session focused on introducing group members, establishing psychological safety, explaining confidentiality and participation norms, and using the Double Technique to facilitate initial emotional expression; participants were assigned homework involving mindful attention to a pleasant or unpleasant daily emotional experience and recording associated bodily sensations. The second session introduced the Role Reversal Technique to strengthen conversational skills, active engagement, and the initiation and maintenance of effective social interactions, with homework emphasizing active listening and accurate reflection of another person's perspective. The third session used storytelling and Future Projection to challenge maladaptive attributional patterns and strengthen adaptive cognitive beliefs, followed by written visualization of an achievable personal success scenario. The fourth session deepened Future Projection through dramatic enactments of future success situations intended to enhance self-efficacy, agency, and perceived competence, with participants practicing structured mental rehearsal of constructive problem solving. The fifth session incorporated Mirror, Reverse Role, and body movement techniques to externalize emotional experiences, improve stress regulation, and support constructive emotional expression; diaphragmatic breathing and somatic awareness were assigned for practice between sessions. The sixth session again used Reverse Role Enactment and Role Reversal, this time to cultivate supportive negotiation, perspective-taking, and deeper behavioral insight, with participants writing an unsent letter from the imagined perspective of a person involved in an unresolved conflict. The seventh session employed self-presentation, self-description, and Empty Chair techniques to facilitate awareness of unresolved cognitive and emotional conflicts, followed by structured internal dialogue with an imagined empty-chair figure. The eighth session incorporated dramatic storytelling and moral dilemmas to promote

perspective-taking, ethical reasoning, and mature social judgment, with participants reflecting on the relational meaning of an emotionally salient short story. The ninth and final session focused on integration of psychodramatic experiences, group reflection, consolidation of learned interpersonal and emotional skills, and formal closure, followed by administration of the posttest and completion of a brief self-appreciation and group-gratitude exercise.

The Transactional Analysis intervention was based on Berne's theoretical and therapeutic framework and its translated clinical guidance and was likewise standardized into nine 90-minute sessions delivered twice weekly to ensure comparability of treatment dosage with the psychodrama condition. The first session focused on establishing therapeutic rapport, orienting participants to the group process, administering baseline measures, and introducing the concept of appropriate and effective strokes in interpersonal relationships; homework required participants to document and briefly analyze a challenging interpersonal encounter. The second session introduced the Parent, Adult, and Child ego states, including structural and functional analysis of the Critical Parent, Nurturing Parent, Adult, Free Child, and Adapted Child, with attention to verbal and nonverbal indicators of each state; participants were asked to identify internal dialogues dominated by Parent or Child functioning. The third session addressed complementary, crossed, and ulterior transactions and their roles in interpersonal misunderstanding and conflict, with participants documenting examples of crossed transactions in daily life. The fourth session introduced the four existential life positions, including the "I'm OK–You're OK" position, and examined early life scripts while encouraging present-centered decision-making through the Adult ego state; homework required reformulation of a self-limiting belief from an Adult perspective. The fifth session addressed difficulties in emotional awareness and labeling through the ego-state framework, emphasizing precise identification and verbalization of affective experiences. The sixth session focused on emotional self-regulation, recognition of defensive patterns, and reduction of impulsive responses that may be linked to maladaptive parental scripting; participants practiced a pause-and-countdown strategy before reacting in emotionally charged situations. The seventh session addressed script injunctions, counter-injunctions, and common behavioral drivers such as "Be Perfect" and "Hurry Up," with particular emphasis on how these patterns may undermine social competence; participants practiced replacing driver-based reactions with

Adult permissions. The eighth session examined psychological games, secondary gains, emotional trading stamps, and the ways these processes interfere with authentic interpersonal relationships, and participants were asked to identify and deliberately disengage from one recurring psychological game. The ninth session introduced the concept of the Integrated Adult, reviewed the interpersonal and emotional self-regulation skills developed across previous sessions, consolidated learning, and supported participants in formulating a practical personal guide for future social functioning before completion of the posttest assessment.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were first calculated to summarize the distribution of social self-empowerment scores across the Transactional Analysis, psychodrama, and control groups at the pretest and posttest stages. The primary inferential analysis was analysis of covariance, with posttest social self-empowerment scores entered as the dependent variable, study group as the fixed factor, and pretest social self-empowerment scores entered as the covariate. This approach was selected to compare post-intervention group differences while statistically controlling for initial between-participant variability in baseline scores. Prior to conducting the

covariance analysis, the relevant statistical assumptions, including normality of the dependent variable within groups, homogeneity of variances, linearity of the relationship between the covariate and outcome, and homogeneity of regression slopes, were examined. After identification of a statistically significant overall group effect, Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons were performed to determine which groups differed significantly from one another and to compare the relative efficacy of Transactional Analysis-based group counseling and psychodrama. Effect size was reported using eta squared to indicate the proportion of posttest variance attributable to group membership after adjustment for baseline scores. All hypothesis tests were conducted using a two-tailed significance level of $p < 0.05$.

3. Findings and Results

Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to examine the comparative effects of Transactional Analysis-based group counseling and psychodrama on social self-empowerment among female students from divorced families. Before conducting the inferential analyses, descriptive statistics were calculated for the pretest and posttest scores, and the normality of score distributions was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and normality test results for social self-empowerment across the three study groups.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test for Social Self-Empowerment

Group	n	Pretest Mean $\pm$ SD	Pretest Shapiro–Wilk W	p	Posttest Mean $\pm$ SD	Posttest Shapiro–Wilk W	p
Transactional Analysis (TA)	12	3.595 $\pm$ 0.089	0.933	0.415	4.794 $\pm$ 0.318	0.902	0.170
Psychodrama	12	3.869 $\pm$ 0.257	0.918	0.272	4.309 $\pm$ 0.356	0.865	0.056
Control	12	4.013 $\pm$ 0.378	0.979	0.978	3.640 $\pm$ 0.313	0.906	0.188

As shown in Table 1, the mean social self-empowerment score in the Transactional Analysis group increased from 3.595 $\pm$ 0.089 at pretest to 4.794 $\pm$ 0.318 at posttest, representing the largest observed improvement among the three groups. In the psychodrama group, the mean score increased from 3.869 $\pm$ 0.257 to 4.309 $\pm$ 0.356, also indicating an improvement following the intervention. In contrast, the control group showed a reduction in the mean social self-empowerment score from 4.013 $\pm$ 0.378 at pretest to 3.640 $\pm$ 0.313 at posttest. The Shapiro–Wilk test was nonsignificant for all pretest and posttest distributions, with all p-values exceeding 0.05. Specifically, pretest p-values

were 0.415, 0.272, and 0.978 for the Transactional Analysis, psychodrama, and control groups, respectively, while corresponding posttest p-values were 0.170, 0.056, and 0.188. These results indicated no statistically significant departure from normality and supported the use of parametric inferential analyses.

Before conducting ANCOVA, the principal assumptions underlying the analysis were evaluated. The interaction between group membership and pretest social self-empowerment scores was not statistically significant, $F(2, 30) = 0.298$, $p = 0.747$, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes was satisfied. Levene's

test was also nonsignificant, $F(2, 33) = 0.112$, $p = 0.895$, demonstrating that the variance of posttest scores was statistically equivalent across the three study groups. Furthermore, White's test for heteroskedasticity was nonsignificant, $\chi^2(6) = 1.532$, $p = 0.957$, confirming the homogeneity of error variances. Taken together with the

normality findings, these results indicated that the major statistical assumptions required for ANCOVA were adequately satisfied and that the covariance analysis could therefore be conducted without evidence of substantial assumption violations.

Table 2

Analysis of Covariance for Posttest Social Self-Empowerment Scores

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Partial η^2
Corrected Model	8.066	3	2.689	23.887	< 0.001	0.691
Intercept	2.963	1	2.963	26.319	< 0.001	0.451
Pretest (Covariate)	0.001	1	0.001	0.000	0.982	0.000
Group	5.712	2	2.856	25.375	< 0.001	0.613
Error	3.602	32	0.113	—	—	—

As presented in Table 2, the overall ANCOVA model was statistically significant, $F(3, 32) = 23.887$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.691$, indicating that the model accounted for a substantial proportion of the variability in posttest social self-empowerment scores. The pretest covariate itself did not significantly predict posttest scores after the other model terms were considered, $F(1, 32) = 0.000$, $p = 0.982$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.000$. Most importantly, after statistically controlling for baseline social self-empowerment scores, a statistically significant main effect of group was observed, $F(2, 32) =$

25.375, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.613$. The effect size indicated that approximately 61.3% of the adjusted variance in posttest social self-empowerment was associated with group membership, representing a large intervention effect. These findings demonstrated that the three groups differed significantly in social self-empowerment following the intervention period and justified subsequent Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons to determine the specific pattern of between-group differences.

Table 3

Adjusted Means and Bonferroni Pairwise Comparisons for Social Self-Empowerment

Group / Comparison	Adjusted Mean	Mean Difference	SE	p	95% CI
Control	3.607	—	—	—	[3.409, 3.805]
Psychodrama	4.343	—	—	—	[4.144, 4.542]
Transactional Analysis (TA)	4.742	—	—	—	[4.533, 4.951]
TA vs. Control	—	1.153	0.164	< 0.001	[0.741, 1.565]
Psychodrama vs. Control	—	0.669	0.140	< 0.001	[0.318, 1.020]
TA vs. Psychodrama	—	0.484	0.149	0.008	[0.111, 0.857]

As shown in Table 3, the adjusted posttest mean was highest in the Transactional Analysis group ($M = 4.742$), followed by the psychodrama group ($M = 4.343$), whereas the control group had the lowest adjusted mean ($M = 3.607$). Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons indicated that participants receiving Transactional Analysis-based group counseling had significantly higher adjusted social self-empowerment scores than those in the control group, $MD = 1.153$, $SE = 0.164$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.741, 1.565]. Similarly, the psychodrama group demonstrated significantly higher adjusted scores than the control group, $MD = 0.669$, $SE = 0.140$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.318, 1.020].

Importantly, the direct comparison between the two active interventions showed that Transactional Analysis produced significantly higher social self-empowerment scores than psychodrama, $MD = 0.484$, $SE = 0.149$, $p = 0.008$, 95% CI [0.111, 0.857]. Thus, although both intervention approaches were effective relative to the control condition, Transactional Analysis-based group counseling demonstrated significantly greater efficacy than psychodrama in enhancing social self-empowerment among female students from divorced families.

4. Discussion

The present study compared the effectiveness of Transactional Analysis-based group counseling and psychodrama in improving social self-empowerment among female adolescents from divorced families. The findings showed that both interventions significantly improved social self-empowerment compared with the control condition after controlling for pretest scores. More specifically, participants in the Transactional Analysis group obtained the highest adjusted posttest mean, followed by those in the psychodrama group, while the control group showed the lowest adjusted mean. The overall group effect was statistically significant, and the magnitude of the effect was large, indicating that a substantial proportion of the variance in posttest social self-empowerment was associated with participation in the interventions. Bonferroni comparisons further demonstrated that both Transactional Analysis and psychodrama were superior to the control condition and, importantly, that Transactional Analysis produced significantly greater improvement than psychodrama. These findings suggest that structured group interventions can meaningfully strengthen the interpersonal, emotional, and self-regulatory capacities of adolescents affected by parental divorce and that Transactional Analysis may offer an additional advantage when the primary therapeutic target is social self-empowerment.

The significant improvement observed in the Transactional Analysis group is consistent with prior evidence indicating that TA can be effective in addressing psychosocial and interpersonal difficulties among adolescents. Ayodeji et al. reported that Transactional Analysis reduced psychosocial challenges among secondary school adolescents, supporting the proposition that helping young people understand their relational patterns and internal ego-state dynamics can facilitate more adaptive social functioning (Ayodeji et al., 2022). The present findings are also in line with the systematic review by Prawitasari et al., which showed that Transactional Analysis has been used successfully in group counseling within educational contexts and may improve self-understanding, communication, interpersonal awareness, and adaptive psychological functioning (Prawitasari et al., 2026). The significant effect found in the current study may therefore be explained by the structured and comprehensible nature of TA, which provides adolescents with a concrete framework for recognizing how they communicate, react, and interpret the behavior of others. For adolescents from divorced

families, who may have experienced inconsistent communication, conflictual exchanges, criticism, emotional withdrawal, or unstable relational boundaries, the ability to identify Parent, Adult, and Child ego states may promote greater awareness of habitual responses and create opportunities to replace reactive patterns with more deliberate and adaptive interpersonal behavior.

The superiority of Transactional Analysis over psychodrama may also be understood in light of the particular demands of social self-empowerment. Social self-empowerment requires not only emotional expression but also the ability to interpret interpersonal situations, regulate reactions, make autonomous decisions, and select effective responses in real time. Contemporary models of TA emphasize autonomy, awareness, spontaneity, and intimacy, all of which are closely related to adaptive social functioning (Tangolo & Massi, 2018). The conceptual review by Vos and van Rijn also supports the relevance of Transactional Analysis to relational functioning, affect regulation, self-awareness, and the restructuring of maladaptive beliefs (Vos & van Rijn, 2021). In the present intervention, participants learned to identify crossed and ulterior transactions, maladaptive scripts, injunctions, behavioral drivers, and psychological games. Such components may have directly targeted the kinds of interpersonal processes that interfere with social confidence and agency. The emphasis on the Adult ego state may have been especially important because it encourages reality-based appraisal, emotional regulation, reflective decision-making, and greater independence from rigid internalized messages. These mechanisms could explain why TA produced a larger improvement in social self-empowerment than the more experiential psychodrama approach.

Another explanation for the stronger effect of Transactional Analysis concerns the role of cognitive restructuring and narrative revision. Adolescents from divorced families may develop maladaptive beliefs about themselves and relationships, including assumptions of rejection, instability, personal blame, unworthiness, or inevitability of conflict. Previous research has shown that children of divorce may exhibit problematic beliefs that are amenable to intervention (Ahmadi et al., 2026). TA directly addresses such beliefs through analysis of life scripts, injunctions, counter-injunctions, and existential positions. By helping adolescents recognize restrictive internal narratives and replace them with more balanced Adult-based interpretations, TA may improve not only how they think about relationships but also how confidently they behave

within them. The relevance of narrative reconstruction is further supported by Gopakumar, who demonstrated that emotionally exploratory TA techniques can help transform restrictive personal narratives and generate alternative interpretations and behavioral possibilities (Gopakumar, 2021). In the current study, these processes may have strengthened participants' sense of agency and social efficacy, particularly by helping them understand that previously learned relational patterns are not fixed and can be consciously modified.

The improvement found in the psychodrama group is likewise consistent with previous research. Psychodrama is fundamentally based on interpersonal enactment, role experimentation, emotional expression, and corrective relational experience, all of which are highly relevant to adolescent social development. Nolte describes psychodrama as a method that enables individuals to explore interpersonal conflicts through techniques such as role reversal, doubling, mirroring, and future projection, thereby promoting insight and behavioral change through action rather than verbal discussion alone (Nolte, 2019). The present psychodrama protocol incorporated these techniques, and the significant improvement in social self-empowerment may reflect repeated opportunities for participants to practice communication, assume alternative perspectives, externalize difficult emotions, and rehearse more adaptive responses within a safe group environment. These processes may be particularly beneficial for adolescents who have experienced family disruption because they can use enactment to explore relational tensions that are difficult to verbalize directly.

The present psychodrama findings also align with systematic evidence showing that psychodrama can improve a range of adolescent mental health and interpersonal outcomes. Ulusoy et al. reported that psychodrama has been effective in addressing both internalizing and externalizing problems among adolescents and may enhance emotional expression, social functioning, and psychological adjustment (Ulusoy et al., 2023). Similarly, Benoni et al. found that a community-based psychodrama intervention supported mental health promotion among adolescents and young adults, with benefits related to emotional expression and interpersonal resources (Benoni et al., 2024). Pires et al. also demonstrated the usefulness of psychodramatic tools with adolescents, particularly for facilitating expression of identity, emotion, and hidden aspects of experience (Pires et al., 2021). These findings are broadly compatible with the present results, in which psychodrama produced

significantly higher social self-empowerment scores than the control condition. By allowing participants to enact conflictual interactions, practice role reversal, observe themselves through mirroring, and imagine more successful future scenarios, psychodrama likely strengthened perspective-taking, emotional awareness, social flexibility, and confidence in interpersonal situations.

The current findings are also supported by broader reviews of psychodrama effectiveness. Maya et al. concluded that psychodrama has demonstrated therapeutic benefits across diverse clinical and nonclinical settings, especially in emotional processing, interpersonal functioning, and psychological well-being (Maya et al., 2025). Wang et al., in a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies, similarly reported positive effects of psychodrama on mental health outcomes (Wang et al., 2024). In addition, Özkan and Doğmuş found that psychodrama can be effective with children across several psychological and behavioral domains, supporting its developmental adaptability (Özkan & Doğmuş, 2026). Although the current sample consisted of older adolescents, these studies collectively indicate that experiential role-based interventions can support psychosocial development across age groups. The present findings extend that evidence by suggesting that psychodrama can also improve social self-empowerment specifically among female adolescents from divorced families.

The beneficial effects of both interventions may also be interpreted through the importance of social-emotional skill development. Social self-empowerment depends on a combination of emotional competence, behavioral skills, interpersonal confidence, and social problem-solving. Previous research has shown that structured interventions can strengthen social competence in students exposed to relational difficulties (Solhjoui et al., 2026). Meta-analytic evidence has likewise demonstrated that intervention-related gains in social-emotional and cognitive skills can be substantial, even though persistence of effects may vary according to intervention design and implementation (Hart et al., 2024). In the present study, both TA and psychodrama provided repeated opportunities for reflection, interpersonal learning, and practice. The group format itself may have contributed to the effects by offering a socially rich context in which participants could receive feedback, observe peers, normalize shared difficulties, and practice new behaviors. These processes are especially important for adolescents from divorced families, who may experience social

withdrawal, reduced trust, heightened sensitivity to rejection, or uncertainty about relational security.

The findings can also be understood within the broader psychosocial consequences of divorce. Hajiheydari et al. described divorce as a phenomenon associated with multidimensional psychological, family, and social harms, indicating that its consequences extend beyond emotional distress alone (Hajiheydari et al., 2026). Morrison et al. similarly highlighted how children may experience constraints on participation, voice, and agency within high-conflict family contexts (Morrison et al., 2020). From this perspective, social self-empowerment represents a particularly meaningful treatment target because it concerns adolescents' ability to function effectively within social relationships rather than merely reducing symptoms. Both interventions may have helped participants regain a sense of agency in interpersonal settings. TA may have done so through understanding and modifying transactions and scripts, whereas psychodrama may have done so through enactment, perspective-taking, and rehearsal of new roles. The fact that both interventions were effective therefore appears theoretically coherent with the relational nature of the difficulties commonly associated with parental divorce.

The relatively greater effect of Transactional Analysis may additionally reflect the structured nature of the intervention. Adolescents experiencing family instability may particularly benefit from predictable conceptual frameworks that organize confusing interpersonal experiences. TA offers explicit categories for interpreting behavior and communication, which may reduce ambiguity and provide a sense of mastery. Javid et al. found that Transactional Analysis training can alter important dimensions of relational functioning, suggesting that structured examination of communication patterns can influence relationship quality (Javid et al., 2025). The present findings suggest that this structured relational learning may be especially useful when the outcome of interest is social self-empowerment. In contrast, psychodrama relies more heavily on experiential and affective processing. Although this is valuable, it may require more time for gains to consolidate into stable cognitive frameworks that guide everyday social behavior. The nine-session format may therefore have favored TA to some extent because its concepts can be quickly learned, labeled, and transferred to routine interactions.

At the same time, the significant psychodrama effect should not be interpreted as clinically minor. Psychodrama may offer unique advantages for participants whose

difficulties are strongly affective, trauma-related, or rooted in inhibited emotional expression. Dayton's neuropsychodrama model emphasizes the value of experiential group processes for relational trauma and affect regulation (Dayton, 2015). Children of divorce who have experienced intense parental conflict, emotional insecurity, or disrupted attachment may benefit from opportunities to reenact and symbolically reorganize difficult experiences. The present findings therefore suggest not that one intervention should universally replace the other, but that their relative utility may depend on the primary therapeutic target and the psychological needs of participants. TA may be particularly efficient for strengthening social self-regulation, communication, and cognitive-relational awareness, whereas psychodrama may be especially useful when emotional expression, role experimentation, and relational processing are central treatment goals.

The role of cultural and contextual fit should also be considered when interpreting the findings. Hirchak et al. emphasized the importance of centering cultural context in treatment and recognizing that interventions become more meaningful when they are responsive to the lived realities of participants (Hirchak et al., 2023). In the present study, both interventions were implemented with Iranian female adolescents from divorced families, a group whose experiences may be shaped by family norms, social expectations, and potential stigma surrounding divorce. A structured group environment may have provided a relatively safe context in which participants could discuss and reinterpret relational experiences without being isolated by them. The effectiveness of both approaches may therefore partly reflect the value of creating a socially supportive and culturally contained setting in which shared experiences could be explored. This interpretation is compatible with the broader literature emphasizing the importance of adapting psychosocial interventions to the needs and contexts of specific populations.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the findings indicate that both Transactional Analysis-based group counseling and psychodrama are effective approaches for improving social self-empowerment among female adolescents from divorced families, but that Transactional Analysis may produce stronger gains when both interventions are delivered with equivalent duration and intensity. This pattern is theoretically plausible because TA directly targets the

cognitive, communicative, and relational processes that underlie social competence and personal agency, while psychodrama primarily promotes change through enactment, emotional processing, and experiential learning. The findings add to previous evidence supporting both interventions and extend the literature by directly comparing them within a vulnerable adolescent population. They also reinforce the broader conclusion that social self-empowerment is a modifiable construct and that structured group counseling can be a valuable component of school-based support for adolescents experiencing parental divorce.

6. Limitations & Suggestions

The present study had several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample was relatively small and consisted only of female senior high school students from divorced families in Ajab Shir County, which limits the generalizability of the findings to male adolescents, younger children, students from other geographical regions, and adolescents with different family structures. Second, purposive sampling was used before random allocation, and the participants were drawn from school counseling records, which may have introduced selection effects. Third, the outcome was assessed primarily through self-report, making the findings potentially vulnerable to response bias, social desirability, or temporary changes in self-perception. Fourth, although the interventions were standardized in duration, therapist characteristics, group dynamics, and nonspecific therapeutic factors may have contributed to the observed effects. Fifth, the relatively short assessment period limits conclusions regarding the long-term stability of treatment gains. Finally, the study focused on a single principal outcome and did not assess potentially relevant mediating variables such as emotion regulation, self-esteem, attachment security, perceived social support, or family conflict.

Future research should replicate the present study with larger and more diverse samples, including male adolescents, mixed-gender groups, different age ranges, and participants from multiple cities and sociocultural settings. Studies with longer follow-up periods are needed to determine whether the superiority of Transactional Analysis persists over time or whether psychodrama gains become more evident after additional consolidation. Future trials could also include active comparison groups, blinded outcome assessment, and multimethod measurement combining self-report, teacher ratings, parent reports, and

behavioral indicators of social competence. Examining mediators and moderators would be particularly valuable, including whether improvements are explained by changes in emotional regulation, cognitive flexibility, interpersonal trust, self-efficacy, or communication skills. It would also be useful to investigate whether baseline characteristics such as time since parental divorce, level of interparental conflict, contact with the noncustodial parent, or initial social competence influence differential response to the two interventions.

In practice, school counselors, psychologists, and adolescent mental health professionals may consider both Transactional Analysis and psychodrama as viable group-based interventions for adolescents affected by parental divorce. Transactional Analysis may be especially useful when the clinical objective is to strengthen communication, self-monitoring, interpersonal decision-making, and awareness of maladaptive relational patterns, whereas psychodrama may be preferable when emotional expression, experiential processing, and role flexibility are central concerns. Schools may benefit from incorporating structured group counseling programs into student support services, particularly for adolescents identified through counseling records as experiencing difficulties after parental divorce. Practitioners should adapt intervention language and exercises to developmental level, ensure confidentiality and psychological safety, involve caregivers appropriately when needed, and monitor participants for signs of acute distress. A flexible, needs-based approach that selects or combines elements of both methods may ultimately provide the most responsive support for adolescents navigating the social and emotional consequences of parental divorce.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have equally contributed to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

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In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

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