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Changes in Attachment Styles and Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Following a Psychodrama Group Intervention: A Pilot Study

Psikodrama Grup Müdahalesi Sonrasında Bağlanma Stilleri ve Kişilerarası Duygu Düzenlemedeki Değişimler: Bir Pilot Çalışma

Şeyma Rodop[1]

[1]Kırklareli University, Kırklareli

ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to investigate preliminary changes following participation in a psychodrama group intervention, a method that enables participants to explore key aspects of their interpersonal behaviors, strengths, limitations, and inconsistencies through observation and feedback from other people.

Methods: The psychodrama group involved nine university students. Before and after the nineteen-session intervention, participants completed Personal Information Form, Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised (ECR – R), Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire and Brief Symptom Inventory. Pre-test and post-test scores were compared to examine changes in attachment-related behaviors and interpersonal emotion regulation strategies.

Results: No statistically significant differences were found between the pre-test and post-test scores on attachment-related behaviors and interpersonal emotion regulation strategies. Considering the results, although the findings did not reach statistical significance, moderate to large effect sizes were observed for attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, perspective taking, and soothing, suggesting that participation in a psychodrama group may be associated with changes in attachment-related processes and interpersonal emotion regulation.

Conclusion: These preliminary findings should be interpreted cautiously and replicated in follow-up studies with a control group.

Keywords: Attachment styles, interpersonal emotion regulation, psychodrama

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışmada, katılımcıların kişilerarası davranışlarını, güçlü yönlerini, sınırlılıklarını ve tutarsızlıklarını diğer bireylerden alınan geri bildirimler ve gözlemler yoluyla keşfetmelerini sağlayan bir yöntem olan psikodrama grup müdahalesine katılımları sonrasında ortaya çıkan öncül değişimlerin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Yöntem: Psikodrama grubunu dokuz üniversite öğrencisi oluşturmuştur. Katılımcılar, on dokuz oturumdan oluşan müdahale öncesinde ve sonrasında Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Yakın İlişkilerde Yaşantılar Envanteri-Gözden Geçirilmiş Formu (YİYE-II), Kişilerarası Duygu Düzenleme Ölçeği ve Kısa Semptom Envanterini doldurmuşlardır. Bağlanma ile ilişkili davranışlar ve kişilerarası duygu düzenleme stratejilerindeki değişimleri incelemek amacıyla ön-test ve son-test puanları karşılaştırılmıştır.

Bulgular: Bağlanma ile ilişkili davranışlar ve kişilerarası duygu düzenleme stratejilerine ilişkin ön-test ve son-test puanları arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir farklılık bulunmamıştır. Bulgular istatistiksel anlamlılığa ulaşmamış olsa da bağlanmanın kaygı ve kaçınma boyutları ile bakış açısı edinme ve yatıştırılma stratejileri için orta ve büyük düzeyde etki büyüklükleri elde edilmiştir. Bu bulgular, psikodrama grubuna katılımın bağlanma ile ilişkili süreçler ve kişilerarası duygu düzenleme üzerindeki değişimlerle ilişkili olabileceğine işaret etmektedir.

Sonuç: Bu öncül bulguların dikkatli bir biçimde yorumlanması ve kontrol grubu içeren takip çalışmalarıyla sınanması gerekmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Bağlanma stilleri, kişilerarası duygu düzenleme, psikodrama

Address For Correspondence: Şeyma Rodop, Kırklareli University Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of Psychology, Kırklareli, Türkiye

e-mail: seymarodop@klu.edu.tr

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Introduction

The reciprocal and causal linkage between two individuals' behaviors, emotions, and thoughts indicates that they are interdependent to each other and involved in an interpersonal relationship. If a relationship is enduring and has strong, frequent, and diverse linkages, it is defined as close (Kelley et al. 1983). It has been a long time, the researchers have been interested in the processes through which individuals develop, maintain, and lose emotional bonds within close relationships (Clark and Reis 1988, Gable et al. 2019, Pietromonaco et al. 2025).

One of the important factors influencing an individual's close relationship's quality is attachment styles. With his pioneering theoretical work, John Bowlby (1973,1980) has attempted to identify the causes and processes of babies' emotional attachment to primary caregiver, as well as the causes of the emotional distress they often experience when physically separated from their primary caregiver. If a caregiver is perceived as responsive and available, that person functions as a secure base for the baby to explore the environment securely. When the caregiver is not perceived as sufficiently available and responsive, the attachment system is activated to re-establish proximity. Through repeated interactions with the caregiver, infants develop internal working models or cognitive representations of both the self and patterns of interaction with significant others (Bowlby 1973, Ainsworth et al. 1978). With numerous studies, the existence of these internal working models has also been demonstrated in adults (Hazan and Shaver 1987, Feeney and Noller 1990).

The main claims of Bowlby's theory were first empirically investigated by Ainsworth and colleagues (1978). They proposed three attachment styles (secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant) that have different patterns between primary caregivers and babies. One of the first studies to apply attachment theory to adult relationships was conducted by Hazan and Shaver (1987) and in this study, attachment patterns proposed by Ainsworth et al. (1978) were taken as the fundamental basis. Hazan and Shaver (1987) conceptualized the three adult attachment styles corresponding to the three basic infant attachment patterns to explain experience differences in romantic relationships of adults: secure, anxious/ambivalent and avoidant. People who have secure attachment style feel secure that attachment figures are available and responsive and they tend to have the most favorable relationship outcomes. Individuals with an avoidant and anxious/ambivalent attachment styles experience a lack of trust towards attachment figures. However, people with anxious/ambivalent while requiring soothing with respect to love by attachment figures and to stay with them; people with avoidant feel uncomfortable with emotional closeness and vulnerability. The identification of individual differences in attachment styles helps us understand why close relationships differ in both their quality and interpersonal nature (Shaver et al. 1988). It has been suggested that these adult attachment styles are functionally similar infant attachment patterns. Individuals seek closeness to their primary caregiver when they are stressed, sick or afraid. Also, they benefit from psychological security that is provided by attachment figures in challenging tasks that can improve their personal growth and sense of competence.

According to attachment theory, the co-regulation of sadness between infant and primary caregiver would lead to the development of skills to independently recognize, accept, and effectively cope with negative emotions (Stern and Cassidy 2018). Based on this, while it has been shown that securely attached individuals have a tendency to use more constructive and effective emotional regulation strategies (e.g., seeking support); it has been suggested that insecurely attached individuals (avoidant and anxious/ambivalent) tend to use maladaptive strategies like to suppress emotional responses and to attribute threat-related situations to uncontrollable causes (Mikulincer and Shaver 2019). While many studies conducted on emotional regulation focus on an individual's internal processes (Gross 1998, Parsafar and Davis 2019), some studies show that the ways people regulate their emotions also have interpersonal consequences (English et al. 2013, Zaki and Williams 2013, Arican-Dinc and Gable 2026). In the process of interpersonal emotional regulation, it is emphasized that people benefit from others to regulate their own emotions (Zaki and Williams 2013). When looking at the relationship between attachment styles and interpersonal emotional regulation, there is a significant relationship between anxious/ambivalent attachment style and interpersonal emotional regulation (Hofmann et al. 2016, Koç et

al. 2019). Hofmann et al. (2016) suggested that frequent reliance on interpersonal emotional regulation strategies may interfere with the development of coping self-efficacy and may contribute to greater psychological distress. More recent research (Messina et al. 2024) has also examined the association between attachment styles and interpersonal emotion regulation. This study found that both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance were associated with interpersonal emotion regulation strategies.

Based on all the above, there is a need for studies helping individuals develop healthy interpersonal relationships and a secure attachment and addressing psychological health. It has been revealed that people in group therapy notice important sides of their own interpersonal behaviors, their strengths, limitations and maladaptive aspects through feedback from others and their own observations (Yalom 1999). Psychodrama, which includes the "action/movement" method into group therapy and explores realities through dramatic techniques (Moreno 1946, Kipper 1992), provides opportunities for participants to experience role reversal, emotional expression and feedback within a supportive group context. A psychodrama session is typically organized into three phases. These are: warm-up, action, and sharing. Warm-up is a phase aimed at fostering group cohesion, spontaneity, trust in the facilitator, and a sense of psychological safety within the group, and it leads to the emergence of the protagonist (Blatner 2000). Each psychodrama session begins with a warm-up. Action is the phase during which most psychodrama techniques such as role reversal, mirroring, and doubling are applied. In role reversal, the protagonist assumes the roles of other significant people in their life, experiencing situations from their perspective. The mirroring technique is used to offer the protagonist a new perspective on themselves and their behavior by allowing to view their behaviors from an external perspective. The doubling is defined as the process by which a leader, co-leader, or group members articulate the protagonist's conscious or unconscious feelings, thoughts, or "inner voice" that has not yet fully expressed, from the protagonist's perspective (von Ameln and Becker-Ebel 2020). During the sharing phase, following the psychodramatic enactment, group members describe what the roles they played—as the protagonist and other group members—reminded them of in their own lives. Additionally, members who played supporting roles may also share how they felt in those roles (Blatner 2000). More recently, Orkibi (2025) suggested several group change factors associated with psychodrama techniques, including perspective-taking and spontaneity.

Psychodrama may create an experiential interpersonal context in which individuals can explore relational patterns, emotional experiences, and expectations regarding close relationships. These experiential processes may facilitate greater awareness of interpersonal patterns and provide opportunities to reconsider maladaptive internal working models through repeated interactions with others (Arriaga et al. 2018). Within the group process, experiences of trust, mutual support, and feedback from others may provide opportunities to encounter interpersonal responsiveness and to reflect on patterns of seeking or avoiding closeness. These processes are theoretically relevant to attachment-related functioning, as attachment orientations are associated with expectations regarding others' availability, responsiveness, and support (Bowlby 1973, Mikulincer and Shaver 2019). In addition, the relational nature of psychodrama may be relevant to interpersonal emotion regulation processes. Interpersonal emotion regulation involves using interpersonal resources to understand, manage, and regulate emotional experiences (Zaki and Williams 2013). Within the psychodrama group, experiences of receiving feedback, observing others' emotional expressions, and participating in supportive interactions may provide opportunities for individuals to become more aware of their own ways of seeking and utilizing interpersonal resources. For instance, role reversal may facilitate perspective taking by allowing participants to experience interpersonal situations from other person's perspective, whereas group sharing may provide opportunities to observe and reflect on different emotional responses within relationships (Baim 2017, Wu et al. 2025). Thus, the experiential and interpersonal features of psychodrama may represent possible processes through which participation in a psychodrama group may be associated with changes in attachment-related patterns and interpersonal emotion regulation strategies.

It has also been shown to have beneficial effects of psychodrama on anxious/ambivalent and avoidant attachment style of late adolescence and early adult participants (Dogan 2010, Helyel et al. 2025, Yilmaz-Karaman et al. 2025). Although previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of psychodrama for various aspects of psychological functioning, empirical evidence regarding its influence on attachment-

related processes and interpersonal emotion regulation remains limited. In particular, studies simultaneously examining changes in attachment styles and interpersonal emotion regulation following psychodrama group interventions are scarce, especially among university students. Addressing this gap may contribute to a better understanding of the interpersonal mechanisms through which psychodrama facilitates psychological change and provides preliminary evidence to guide future controlled intervention studies.

Given the exploratory nature of this pilot study and the limited evidence regarding psychodrama's influence on attachment-related processes and interpersonal emotion regulation among university students, the present study aimed to investigate preliminary changes following participation in a psychodrama group intervention. For this purpose, it was hypothesized that participation in the psychodrama group would be associated with reductions in attachment-related anxious/ambivalent and avoidant dimensions and changes in interpersonal emotion regulation strategies reflecting more adaptive interpersonal emotion regulation processes.

Method

Sample

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling among students enrolled at Kırklareli University who volunteered to participate in a psychodrama group. Across the two announcement periods, a total of 33 students applied to participate (14 during the initial announcement period and 19 during the second announcement period). The inclusion criteria were: (1) being an enrolled student at Kırklareli University, and (2) volunteering to participate and agreeing to the group rules. The exclusion criteria were: (1) presence of clinically significant psychological symptoms, as assessed by the Brief Symptom Inventory, and (2) being in the same department/class or sharing a dormitory room with another group member. During the initial announcement period, 14 individuals indicated their willingness to participate. All applicants attended an intake interview. After the interviews, two applicants were excluded because the group already included individuals from the same department and class. Of the remaining 12 applicants, five withdrew from the group before the first session because of personal reasons (e.g., beginning employment, enrolling in other courses). The sample size was determined by considering the practical structure of a psychodrama group and the availability of eligible volunteers. As a result, the psychodrama group initially started with seven participants in the first week, and two additional participants joined the group during the second week, reaching nine participants.

Considering that the initial number of participants could pose a risk to the sustainability of the group, the announcement continued until the fourth session with supervisor approval. During the second announcement period, 19 individuals applied for participation and all attended an intake interview. Seven individuals met the eligibility criteria and joined the group during the fourth and fifth sessions. The remaining 12 individuals were not included because they did not meet the eligibility criteria, the scheduled day and time was not suitable for them, or they indicated that they would participate but did not attend the group. With the inclusion of these seven participants, the group reached a total of 16 participants. Throughout the group process, participant dropouts occurred. Among the nine group members from the initial period, four dropped out because of missing two consecutive sessions and personal reasons. Similarly, among the seven group members who joined during the second announcement period, three dropped out because of missing two consecutive sessions and personal reasons. Following these dropouts, nine participants remained in the group and completed both the pre-test and post-test assessments. Therefore, only these participants were included in the statistical analyses. Accordingly, the final sample consisted of 9 university students (8 women, 1 man) aged between 19 and 25 years ($M = 21.4$, $SD = 2.2$). The more detailed characteristics of the participants are presented in the Results section.

Procedure

Before the data collection process began, ethical approval was obtained from the Kırklareli University

Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee on December 18, 2023 (No: 2023/106643). A poster has been prepared for group announcement. The poster includes a briefly description of psychodrama, information about who is eligible to participate in the group sessions, where and during which hours the sessions will take place, who will facilitate them, and the contact details for those who wish to participate or obtain further information. The group members were reached through the distribution of the prepared announcement poster to students attending classes, facilitated by faculty members working in various departments of the university. An intake interview was conducted with the students who volunteered to participate in the study, during which they were informed about the psychodrama and research process, and the group rules were explained. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before any data were collected.

Table 1. Summary of group psychodrama sessions and main themes

Session	Main Themes Addressed
1	Introduction, building trust, and establishing group rules
2	Modes of self-expression
3	Intra-group distance, balancing proximity-remoteness, and trust building
4	Increasing group cohesion through similarities
5	Somatic manifestations of emotions and physical trust exercises
6	Emotional expression and boundaries
7	Future expectations, longings, and the first protagonist enactment
8	Roles within the group, support, and cooperation during crises
9	Need for a safe space and protagonist enactment on unconscious processes
10	Internal conflicts, uncertainty and protagonist enactment on extremes
11	Unexpressed thoughts and feelings in relationships
12	Group play based on needs; protagonist enactment on fears and boundaries
13	Caregiver-receiver relationship and parental roles
14	Interpersonal relationships
15	Dyadic dialogues with parents, partners, and friends
16	Themes of separation and loss (Impact of group member dropout)
17	Social approval, self-confidence, and internalization of group support
18	Transfer of gains to daily life and processes of change
19	Termination and closing session

Following the preliminary interview, the person who accepted the group rules completed the Personal Information Form and the Brief Symptom Inventory. On the day of the first psychodrama session, prior to any group activities, participants completed the Experiences in Close Relationships - Revised (ECR-R) and the Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire. The psychodrama sessions were facilitated by the researcher, who served as the group leader. A co-therapist also participated throughout the group process. The researcher had completed the required theoretical and practical training in psychodrama and was in the final stage of the certification process. The sessions were conducted under regular supervision provided by an experienced certified psychodramatist. Supervision meetings were held every two weeks throughout the group process to review previous sessions and to discuss the planning of subsequent sessions. Psychodrama sessions were carried out with university students from different departments who were enrolled at Kırklareli University between October 9 and December 25, 2024, at the Kırklareli University seminar hall. A total of 19 sessions were completed. Sessions were initially planned on a weekly basis. However, in order to complete the group process within the fall academic semester, at the eighth session, it was decided with the agreement of all group members, several sessions were conducted consecutively on the same day. Accordingly, Sessions 9-10, 11-12, 13-15, 16-17 and 18-19 were each conducted on the same day. Each session was approximately 90 minutes long.

Each 90-minute session followed the classical psychodrama structure, consisting of a warming-up phase, an action phase and a sharing phase. Depending on the needs of the group, the action phase consisted of either protagonist enactments or group-based psychodramatic activities. During the initial sessions, the primary focus was on enhancing self-awareness, establishing trust and strengthening group cohesion. The first protagonist enactment was conducted in the seventh session, after sufficient group cohesion had

been established. Although the general themes of the sessions were planned, flexibility was maintained by adapting according to the needs and preferences of the group members during each session. A summary of the content of the psychodrama sessions is provided in Table 1.

After the final session, the post-tests were administered, including the Experiences in Close Relationships - Revised (ECR-R), the Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, and the Brief Symptom Inventory. Following data collection, participants confidentiality and data security were maintained by identifying participants using pseudonyms in the study records, storing data collection forms in a locked drawer, and storing the electronic dataset on a password-protected computer. The entered data were also carefully checked multiple times to minimize potential data entry errors.

Measures

Personal Information Form

The Personal Information Form, developed by the researcher, consists of a total of 11 items—nine open-ended and two multiple-choice—and includes information such as the participants' gender, age, year of study at the university, department, relationship status, number of siblings, and birth order; as well as their parents' age, education, occupation, and economic status.

Experiences in Close Relationships - Revised (ECR-R)

The Experiences in Close Relationships-II was developed by Fraley et al. (2000) to measure attachment styles and The Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Selçuk et al. (2005). The scale consists of a total of 36 items, 18 measuring anxiety and 18 measuring avoidance. Participants rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale. The items measuring anxiety and avoidance dimensions are summed separately, and their averages are calculated to obtain individual scores for each of the two dimensions. In the Turkish validity and reliability study of the Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory-II conducted by Selçuk et al. (2005), the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was found to be .90 for the avoidance dimension and .86 for the anxiety dimension.

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire

The Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, developed by Hofmann et al. (2016) to assess how individuals turn to others to regulate their emotions, The Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Sarısoy-Aksüt and Gençöz (2022). The scale consists of a total of 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale and has four subscales: enhancing positive affect, soothing, gaining perspective, and social modeling. "Enhancing positive affect" measures the extent to which individuals prefer to be with others during intense emotional moments in order to increase their positive emotions. "Soothing" assesses how much a person seeks out others for comfort and relaxation. "Gaining perspective" measures the extent to which others' reassurance—such as telling the individual that the situation is not as bad as it seems and that they should not worry—helps regulate their emotions. Finally, "social modeling" evaluates how observing others' ways of coping with a situation influences an individual's ability to manage their own emotions. Lower scores on the scale indicate lower levels of interpersonal emotion regulation.

In the original version of the scale (Hofmann et al. 2016), the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients for the subscales were found to range between .85 and .91. In the Turkish validity and reliability study conducted by Sarısoy-Aksüt and Gençöz (2022), the coefficients were reported as .82 for enhancing positive affect, .79 for gaining perspective, .88 for soothing, and .89 for social modeling.

Brief Symptom Inventory

The Brief Symptom Inventory, developed by Derogatis (1992) to assess psychological symptoms in individuals, is the short version of the Symptom Checklist-90 (Derogatis et al. 1976). The Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Şahin and Durak (1994) through three separate studies, and it was shown that the scale consists of a total of 53 items and includes five subscales: anxiety, depression, negative self, hostility, and somatization. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, and higher total

scores indicate a greater frequency of psychological symptoms. As a result of the three studies conducted to determine the psychometric properties of the scale, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficients for the overall total score were found to range between .93 and .96. The alpha coefficients for the subscales vary between .75 and .87.

Statistical Analysis

The study result analyses were conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 21. Descriptive statistics were calculated for variables. Prior to main analyses, the normality of the difference scores (post-test minus pre-test) was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Although the difference scores did not significantly deviate from normality, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used because of the small sample size (n=9). The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used to compare pre-test and post-test scores for anxiety and avoidance dimensions of attachment styles and the interpersonal emotion regulation strategies (enhancing positive affect, soothing, gaining perspective, and social modeling). In addition, pre-test and post-test scores on the Brief Symptom Inventory were compared using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. Effect sizes (r) were calculated using the formula r = Z / √N. Statistical signific

Results

The findings of this study, which aimed to investigate preliminary changes in attachment styles and interpersonal emotion regulation abilities among university students following a psychodrama group intervention, are presented in three parts. First, the demographic informations of the participants are reported. Then, descriptive findings for the pre-test and post-test measurements are presented, followed by the results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test

The final sample was characterized by variation in demographic characteristics. Regarding academic year, 33.3% (N = 3) of the participants were first-year students; 11.1% (N = 1) were second-year students; 22.2% (N = 2) were third-year students, and 22.2% (N = 2) were fourth-year students, while 11.1% (N = 1) were graduate students. The mothers of the participants were between 39 and 59 years old (M = 45.2, SD = 6.5), and 22.2% had a high school diploma or higher level of education. The fathers were between 43 and 52 years old (M = 46.4, SD = 3.1), and 55.5% had at least a middle school level of education. Most participants (88.9%, N = 8) perceived their economic status as middle, whereas one participant (11.1%) perceived it as low. In addition to these, it was found that 77.8% of the participants were in a romantic relationship, while 22.2% were not. Among those who were in a relationship, the duration of romantic relationship was 0-6 months for 33.3% of them, 6 months to 1 year for 22.2%, and 2 to 5 years for 22.2%.

The means and standard deviations of the scores obtained from the pre-test and post-test measurements of the study's variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The mean and standard deviation values of the pre-test and post-test measurements

Variables	Psychodrama Group				
		Time 1 (Pre-test)		Time 2 (Post-test)	
	n	M	SD	M	SD
Experiences in Close Relationships					
Avoidant	9	3.58	1.3	2.95	0.9
Anxious	9	4.54	1.0	4.03	1.3
Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire					
Enhancing positive emotions	9	20.78	4.5	22.44	4.2
Soothing	9	16.11	5.5	17.56	4.9
Gaining a perspective	9	13.89	5.4	16.11	4.8
Taking social model	9	20.00	5.4	20.33	4.6
Brief Symptom Inventory	9	136.22	42.5	122.78	42.2

M = mean; N=sample size; SD = standard deviation. Higher scores indicate greater levels of the construct

The Brief Symptom Inventory scores were also compared between the pre- and post- assessments. No statistically significant difference was found between pre-test and post-test scores (Z = -1.19, p > .05, r = .40). The results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, together with the median and interquartile range values for all study variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Wilcoxon signed-rank test results for pre-test and post-test scores

Variables	Pre-test Median (IQR)	Post-test Median (IQR)	Z	p	r
Experiences in Close Relationships					
Avoidant	3.44 (1.63)	2.88 (1.25)	-1.72	.085	.57
Anxious	4.38 (1.56)	4.25 (2.13)	-1.48	.139	.49
Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Questionnaire					
Enhancing positive emotions	22 (8)	22 (5)	-0.26	.799	.09
Soothing	16 (7)	19 (6)	-1.20	.230	.40
Gaining a perspective	13 (9)	16 (6)	-1.50	.134	.50
Taking social model	22 (2)	21 (4)	-0.54	.589	.18
Brief Symptom Inventory	127 (65)	113 (41)	-1.19	.236	.40

IQR = interquartile range (Q3 – Q1). r represents the effect size calculated for the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

According to the results, participants' scores on the avoidance dimension of attachment styles showed a non-significant difference between pre- and post-psychodrama sessions (Z = -1.72, p = .08, r = .57). In other words, the mean score for the avoidance dimension of attachment in close relationships decreased from pre-test (M = 3.58, SD = 1.25) to post-test (M = 2.95, SD = 0.93). In addition, no significant difference was found between pre-test and post-test scores on the participants' anxiety dimension of attachment styles (Z = -1.48, p > .05, r = .49).

An examination of the results regarding participants' interpersonal emotion regulation strategies indicated that there were no significant differences between pre- and post-psychodrama sessions in enhancing positive affect, soothing, perspective taking, and social modeling strategies [respectively: (Z = -0.26, p > .05, r = .09), (Z = -1.20, p > .05, r = .40), (Z = -1.50, p > .05, r = .50), (Z = -0.54, p > .05, r = .18)].

Discussion

The present pilot study aimed to examine preliminary changes in attachment styles and interpersonal emotion regulation strategies following a psychodrama group intervention among university students. In line with this aim, it was hypothesized that participation in the psychodrama group would be associated with reductions in attachment-related anxious/ambivalent and avoidant dimensions, as well as changes in interpersonal emotion regulation strategies reflecting more adaptive interpersonal emotion regulation processes.

The findings indicated that participants demonstrated lower attachment avoidance scores following participation in the psychodrama group. Although a decrease was also observed in the anxiety dimension of attachment, this change did not reach statistical significance. Furthermore, no significant differences were found between pre- and post-intervention scores in interpersonal emotion regulation strategies, including enhancing positive affect, soothing, perspective taking, and social modeling.

A more detailed examination of the findings revealed a reduction in post-test avoidance scores among university students who participated in the psychodrama group. However, this reduction did not reach statistical significance. Nevertheless, the observed effect size was relatively large (r=.57), suggesting that psychodrama may be associated with changes in attachment avoidance that warrant further investigation in larger controlled studies. The direction of this finding is consistent with the study by Helyel et al. (2025), which demonstrated that psychodrama has a beneficial effect on adolescents' insecure attachment styles. Similarly, a study among young women 18-25 years observed reductions in both attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety following a psychodrama group intervention (Yilmaz-Karaman et al. 2025). The direction of the observed change in the present study can be compatible with the interpersonal processes

emphasized in psychodrama. Experiences such as role reversal, sharing and corrective interpersonal experiences may provide opportunities for participants to reflect on interpersonal expectations and patterns related to attachment (Baim 2017). Orkibi (2025) also suggested perspective-taking and spontaneity as group change factors associated with psychodrama techniques. However, in the present study, the observed reduction in avoidance attachment did not reach statistical significance, which may be attributable to the smaller sample size and the absence of a control group.

Another finding of this study is that participants' anxious attachment scores did not show a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test assessments. This result is inconsistent with the findings of Doğan (2010). Nevertheless, although no statistically significant change was observed, a decrease in anxiety scores was noted in the post-test. One possible explanation is that participants may have begun to develop self-awareness through psychodramatic processes such as role reversal, doubling, and sharing, possibly by engaging in corrective emotional experiences within a safe group context. On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that deeper structures such as attachment related patterns because of the relatively stable nature of them may require a longer intervention and repeated corrective interpersonal experiences to produce observable changes.

When the results regarding participants' interpersonal emotion regulation strategies were examined, it was found that although scores for the strategies of enhancing positive affect, soothing, perspective taking, and social modeling increased after the psychodrama sessions compared to pre-test scores, the difference between pre-test and post-test scores was not statistically significant. The relatively small sample size may have limited the ability to detect statistically significant differences. In addition, interpersonal emotion regulation strategies may require longer intervention periods and repeated interpersonal experiences. Nevertheless, the observed increases in scores for enhancing positive affect, perspective taking, and social modeling at post-test compared to pre-test may reflect interpersonal experiences occurring within the psychodrama group process in helping individuals become aware of important aspects of their interpersonal behaviors—both strengths and maladaptive patterns—through feedback from other group members and their own observations within the group context. Previous research indicates that social support is closely associated with both interpersonal emotion regulation and attachment styles (Gökdağ 2021) and one important source of social support is the group itself (Messina et al. 2021). In addition, Gökdağ (2021) reported that attachment anxiety was positively associated with all interpersonal emotion regulation strategies. More recent research has also shown that both attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance are associated with interpersonal emotion regulation strategies (Messina et al. 2024). In the present study, attachment anxiety scores tended to decrease, while the use of soothing — defined as the extent to which individuals seek others for comfort — was found to increase at post-test assessment. This finding may suggest that the increase in soothing reflected the supportive interpersonal environment fostered within the group, rather than necessarily being linked to attachment-anxiety. The psychodrama group process may have fostered participants' awareness that they are not alone by providing opportunities for sharing experiences, encouraging them to share their emotions and become more open to receiving support from others. It can be argued that the sense of trust and belonging developed among group members may have increased participants' tendency to turn to others during emotionally challenging moments. Based on these findings, it is evident that further studies with larger sample sizes, controlled designs, and follow-up assessments are needed to examine the effects of psychodrama on interpersonal emotion regulation strategies.

At the conclusion of the present study, although it was observed that psychodrama was associated with changes in attachment-related behaviors in close relationships and interpersonal emotion regulation strategies, the study has some limitations. First, the small sample size limits the statistical power of the study. In addition, because eight of the nine participants were women, findings should be carefully considered for populations with different gender distributions. Second, the absence of a control group led to lack of causal interpretations of the pre-post findings. Third, the lack of the follow-up assessment limits conclusions about the long-term maintenance of the observed changes. An additional limitation concerns the group composition. Because of difficulties in reaching volunteers willing to participate in the study, the group initially consisted of seven members at the beginning of the sessions, and subsequently, new

members were added to the group until the fifth session, as it was considered that a change in group size might lead to a risk to group continuity. However, this limitation was attempted to be compensated for by extending the number of sessions but changes in group membership may have influenced group cohesion and group processes, which may in turn have affected the study outcomes. Finally, participants' possible concurrent psychological or psychiatric treatment information during the group process was not collected. Therefore, the potential influence of other interventions on the observed changes cannot be ignored. Additionally, multiple statistical comparisons may have increased the risk of Type I error.

The present pilot study contributes to the growing literature by providing preliminary evidence regarding potential changes in attachment-related processes and relatively emerging concept of interpersonal emotion regulation following participation in a psychodrama group intervention. It is considered important to increase the number of studies focusing on close relationships, which constitute one of the developmental tasks of adolescence and young adulthood among university students in these developmental stages, and further research examining the link between psychodrama and interpersonal emotion regulation is expected to make a meaningful contribution to the field.

Although the changes did not reach statistical significance, several outcomes yielded moderate to large effect sizes. These preliminary findings should be interpreted cautiously. However, the observed effect sizes warrant further investigation in larger randomized controlled studies with follow-up assessments to better explore the potential effects of psychodrama. In addition, the potential role of sociodemographic characteristics, such as parental education, socioeconomic status, and relationship status, should also be considered in future research on attachment-related behaviors and interpersonal emotion regulation.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate preliminary changes in attachment-related behaviors and interpersonal emotion regulation following participation in a psychodrama group intervention among university students. Findings showed that although observed changes did not reach statistical significance, moderate to large effect sizes were noticed for attachment-related behaviors and interpersonal emotion regulation. Given that the current study is a pilot study, the findings should be interpreted carefully due to the small sample size, the absence of a control group, and the lack of follow-up assessment. Future research using randomized controlled designs and longitudinal follow-up assessments is needed to clarify the potential role of psychodrama in attachment-related behaviors and interpersonal emotion regulation among university students. Furthermore, exploring the potential role of sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., parental education, socioeconomic status, and relationship status) could provide a more comprehensive understanding of attachment-related behaviors and interpersonal regulation.

Results

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