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Psychological Consequences of Character Immersion: An Exploration of Actors Performing Macbeth in Contemporary Bangladeshi Theatre

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how performing a theatrical role can bring about changes in an actor's psychological structure and how such changes may subsequently generate negative effects in the actor's personal life. This study examines the mental health and psychological experiences of actors who have portrayed the character of *Macbeth* in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The primary objective of the study was to explore the process of character-induced psychological transformation. To achieve this objective, the study examined the psychological stress and challenges experienced by actors during their state of deep emotional and psychological engagement with the character (Role-in) and during the process of disengaging from the character and returning to their normal personal lives after the completion of the performance (Role-out).

INTRODUCTION

Research on the process of character-induced psychological transformation among actors in Bangladeshi theatre remains limited. To address this gap, the present study examines the changes in actors' psychological states resulting from deep immersion in theatrical characters during the acting process and analyzes the associated mental health risks. This study examines changes in actors' psychological states and the corresponding mental health hazards resulting from character immersion during the acting process. Specifically, it examines the psychological stress, trauma, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, hallucinations and changes in personality that performers encounter due to the application of method acting and emotional memory techniques. Research and empirical instances indicate that profound absorption in a role might destabilize an actor's psychological equilibrium and impede the reintegration into ordinary life post-performance. To analyze theatrical characters, this study employs Freudian psychological theories, specifically the constructs of the id, ego and superego, the Oedipus complex and the conceptions of mental disorders. Through an investigation of characters in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, this study demonstrates how ambition, fear, guilt and the desire for power all contribute to a character's psychological doom and how the actor portraying the role could reflect this psychological structure. Additionally, drawing on Moreno's role theory, classical conditioning theory and Freudian defense mechanisms, the study explains how an actor's own psychological experiences might combine with the emotions, trauma and experiences of a character to cause mental suffering. Overall, this study indicates that actors portraying the character of Macbeth experience complex psychological processes both during their immersion in the role (Role-in) and during the transition back to real life after the performance (Role-out). Therefore, the findings underscore the importance of safeguarding actors' mental health and implementing safe acting practices to help them overcome post-performance psychological stress and challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Method Acting and Mental Stress

Mental health refers to a state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being, enabling individuals to cope with stress, work productively, and contribute to their community. Mental well-being, a broader term, encompasses the positive aspects of mental health, including resilience, life satisfaction, and a sense of purpose (Magomedova & Fatima, 2025, para. 1). Method acting is intrinsically linked to discussions of mental health. Scholars including Elizabeth Ann Townsend (2009), Gabriel L. Arias (2019), Susanna Rebecca Sammut (2013), Cornelius and Brian Franklin (2021), Alexander Lee-Rekers (2021), Brianna Vitands (n.d.), and Delgado (2023) have examined the psychological consequences of method acting, particularly the use of emotional or affective

memory. Their analyses suggest that excessive reliance on personal memories in performance may result in adverse psychological outcomes, including emotional exhaustion, anxiety, trauma, depression, cognitive strain, and psychological distress.

Konstantin Stanislavski introduced the technique of "emotional memory" or "affective memory," encouraging actors to draw upon personal experiences and emotions to achieve realism in performance. However, concerns regarding the psychological risks associated with this approach emerged over time. Townsend (2009) reported that a young actress experienced a psychological breakdown and developed hysteria while employing emotional memory techniques. Such incidents contributed to Michael Chekhov's rejection of the method, while Stanislavski himself later abandoned its extensive use after recognizing its potential dangers (Townsend, 2009, p. 8).

One of the most frequently cited examples of the psychological impact of intense character immersion is that of Heath Ledger. Sammut (2013) observed that Ledger became deeply absorbed in the psychological world of the Joker, subsequently experiencing severe mental distress before his premature death at the age of 28 (pp. 21–22). This example has often been used to illustrate how excessive identification with a character may extend beyond performance and affect an actor's psychological well-being.

Hetzler (2019) further characterized affective memory as possessing a "dangerous reputation," arguing that its application has been associated with detachment from reality, hyperventilation, anxiety, panic attacks, depression, and, in extreme cases, suicide (pp. 1–2). Such observations underscore the potential psychological costs of methods that require actors to repeatedly engage with distressing personal experiences.

Evidence from the Indian film industry similarly highlights the mental health implications of intense character immersion. Bhaswani (2018) documented that actors such as Varun Dhawan, Randeep Hooda, and Aamir Khan experienced prolonged psychological stress associated with demanding roles, occasionally requiring medical intervention, while Deepika Padukone has publicly discussed her struggle with depression (pp. 38–39). These accounts suggest that the psychological effects of immersive acting practices may transcend cultural and industrial contexts.

Additional research/scholarship has identified comparable concerns, including anxiety, emotional exhaustion, difficulties disengaging from roles, and the resurfacing of painful memories during performance preparation (see also

Arias, 2019; Demarce, 2022; Franklin, 2021; Lee-Rekers, 2021; Delgado, 2023; Bhargava, 2023). Collectively, these studies indicate that although method acting and emotional memory may enhance emotional authenticity in performance, they also entail significant psychological risks. Evidence from both scholarly literature and real-life examples suggests that these techniques may contribute to anxiety, depression, trauma-related symptoms, dissociation, and other forms of psychological distress among actors. Consequently, contemporary scholars increasingly advocate the adoption of alternative approaches to character development that minimize excessive reliance on personal traumatic memories while preserving artistic effectiveness.

Drama Characters and Psychology

Freudian psychological concepts have long been employed to examine the complex mental structures represented in dramatic characters. Through frameworks such as the Oedipus complex and the structural model of the psyche (Id, Ego and Superego), psychoanalytic criticism has contributed to understanding unconscious conflict, desire, guilt, and psychological disturbance in dramatic literature across different periods and contexts (see also Al-Selman et al., 2019; Reza, 2014; Yuen, 2016; Mitra, 2017; Chowdhury, 2023). These studies collectively demonstrate the continuing relevance of Freudian psychology as a theoretical approach to dramatic analysis.

Psychological approaches have been particularly significant in interpretations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Nagi (2019) contended that Macbeth gradually exhibits symptoms comparable to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including guilt, anxiety, nightmares, fear, and trauma, which ultimately contribute to his repeated acts of violence. From a Freudian perspective, Angkasa (2015) further argued that Macbeth's actions result from persistent conflict among the Id, Ego, and Superego. Although moral restraint initially governs his behavior, the Id's desire for power eventually dominates, leading to his psychological and moral disintegration (p. 40).

Collectively, these analyses demonstrate that psychological approaches provide valuable insights into both the characterization of Macbeth and the experiences of those who perform the role. By illuminating themes of guilt, trauma, internal conflict, and psychological distress, these studies highlight the continued relevance of psychoanalytic perspectives in contemporary dramatic research.

Psychological Conflict Analysis of the Character of Macbeth

William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a profoundly psychological tragedy in which inner conflict, fear, guilt, and ambition are dramatized through the consciousness and actions of its protagonist. Several scholars identify Macbeth's encounter with the witches as the catalyst for his psychological decline, arguing that the prophecies awaken his latent ambition and intensify his desire for power (Garber, 2004; Haque, 2006). Under Lady Macbeth's influence, the murder of King Duncan initiates a process of moral and psychological disintegration characterized by fear, suspicion, and emotional instability. Hayat et al. (2021) contended that Macbeth's obsession with power gradually destroys his conscience, inner peace, and spiritual tranquility, ultimately paving the way for self-destruction (pp. 117-120).

A recurring theme in the literature is Macbeth's deteriorating mental state following Duncan's murder. Several scholars identify insomnia, hallucinations, anxiety, terror, guilt, and recurring nightmares as key indicators of his psychological collapse (Gunams, 2022; Tahmasebi, 2018; Al-Abdullah et al., 2024; Al-Rahid et al., 2017). Macbeth's vision of the bloodstained dagger before Duncan's murder, the appearance of Banquo's ghost, and his inability to sleep are frequently interpreted as manifestations of overwhelming guilt and emotional distress. These symptoms progressively intensify, contributing to confusion, impaired judgment, and increasing detachment from reality. Furthermore, fear of losing power motivates Macbeth to commit additional acts of violence, reinforcing the cycle of anxiety, guilt, and psychological instability that ultimately leads to his downfall (Al Bitar, 2019).

From a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, scholars have commonly interpreted Macbeth's tragedy as the consequence of unresolved conflict among the Id, Ego, and Superego. Patil (2024), Saul (2020), and Howard (2019) argued that Macbeth's ambition and desire for power reflect the dominance of the Id, while feelings of guilt and moral obligation signify the operation of the Superego. The Ego, unable to mediate effectively between these opposing psychic forces, gradually loses control, resulting in psychological fragmentation and moral disintegration. Although some critics have extended this interpretation through the lens of the Oedipus complex (Shakur, n.d.), Freudian analyses predominantly emphasize the destructive consequences of imbalance within Macbeth's psychic structure. Scholars have also highlighted the transformation of Macbeth's identity throughout the play. Garber (2004) noted that Shakespeare's use of clothing imagery symbolically represents Macbeth's transition from loyal general to tyrannical ruler. As Macbeth increasingly abandons his former moral values, he experiences profound self-alienation and emotional numbness. His

progression from internal conflict to psychological collapse ultimately completes his tragic descent from humanity into monstrosity.

Collectively, these studies suggest that Macbeth's psychological conflict is shaped by the interaction of ambition, guilt, fear, and unconscious impulses. Whether examined through clinical descriptions of mental distress or Freudian psychoanalytic frameworks, Macbeth emerges as a dramatic representation of the devastating psychological consequences of unchecked desire and unresolved internal conflict.

Moreno's Role Theory, Classical Conditioning Theory, Freudian Theory and the Psychological State of Actors

Understanding the psychological effect of dramatic characters on actors necessitates the comprehension of the Moreno's Role Theory, Classical Conditioning Theory and Freudian Defense Mechanism Theory. Moreno (Leonardis, 2021; Jakovina & Jakovina, 2017; Brown, 2019) stated that Personality formation fundamentally occurs through the development of roles. While playing a character, theatre actors inevitably confront their unconscious emotions, fears and internal conflicts. In other words, to delve deeply into a character, actors frequently rediscover unfamiliar or previously suppressed feelings which generate psychological distress, mystification and internal tension. In this process, the emotional characteristics of the given character may combine with the actor's Personal psychological state, potentially jeopardizing their mental equilibrium. Contrarily, Classical Conditioning Theory (Feldman, 2019-20) "What Is the Effect of Classical Conditioning? (n.d.) explained that individuals form emotional responses by associating new stimuli with prior experiences. In the context of acting, this theory becomes relevant when actors connect a character's traumatic or emotionally charged experiences with their own lived experiences. Consequently, actors may develop psychological reactions such as fear, phobia, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This illustrates that while reconstructing a character's internal pain or fear, the actor's brain links new stimuli with past experiences, thereby producing intense emotional responses.

Freudian psychoanalytic theory, particularly the concept of defense mechanisms (MacLeod, 2024) described that when conflict arises among the id, ego and superego, individuals unconsciously adopt psychological defense strategies to safeguard themselves from distress. Defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, displacement, projection, regression, rationalization and introjection can all be observed among actors, especially when they play emotionally intense, guilt-ridden or psychologically stressful characters.

Prolonged use of these defense mechanisms can destabilize an actor's mental state leading to post-performance issues in real life including anxiety, phobia, insomnia and emotional exhaustion. Collectively, these three theoretical frameworks specify that when actors immerse themselves in the deep psychology of a character, they do not merely emulate the character's emotions but also reconstruct their own internal psychological structures. Consequently, the act becomes a place of self-discovery as well as a possible cause of psychological disturbance. For example, after entering traumatic states through emotional memory recall, actors may have severe headaches and neck pain; irregular sleep patterns after performances may cause fear and psychological instability; actors may continue to act under the influence of a character in real life even after the performance; excessive use of imagination in character portrayal may cause psychologically distressing situations; actors may mutter character dialogue in their sleep, causing heightened fear; prolonged attachment to a character may cause irritability; and the character's fear and anxiety may show up as disruptions in behavior, movement, balance and the emergence of intrusive or unwanted thoughts. These findings unequivocally show the extreme psychological fragility that actors may encounter as a result of intense character immersion

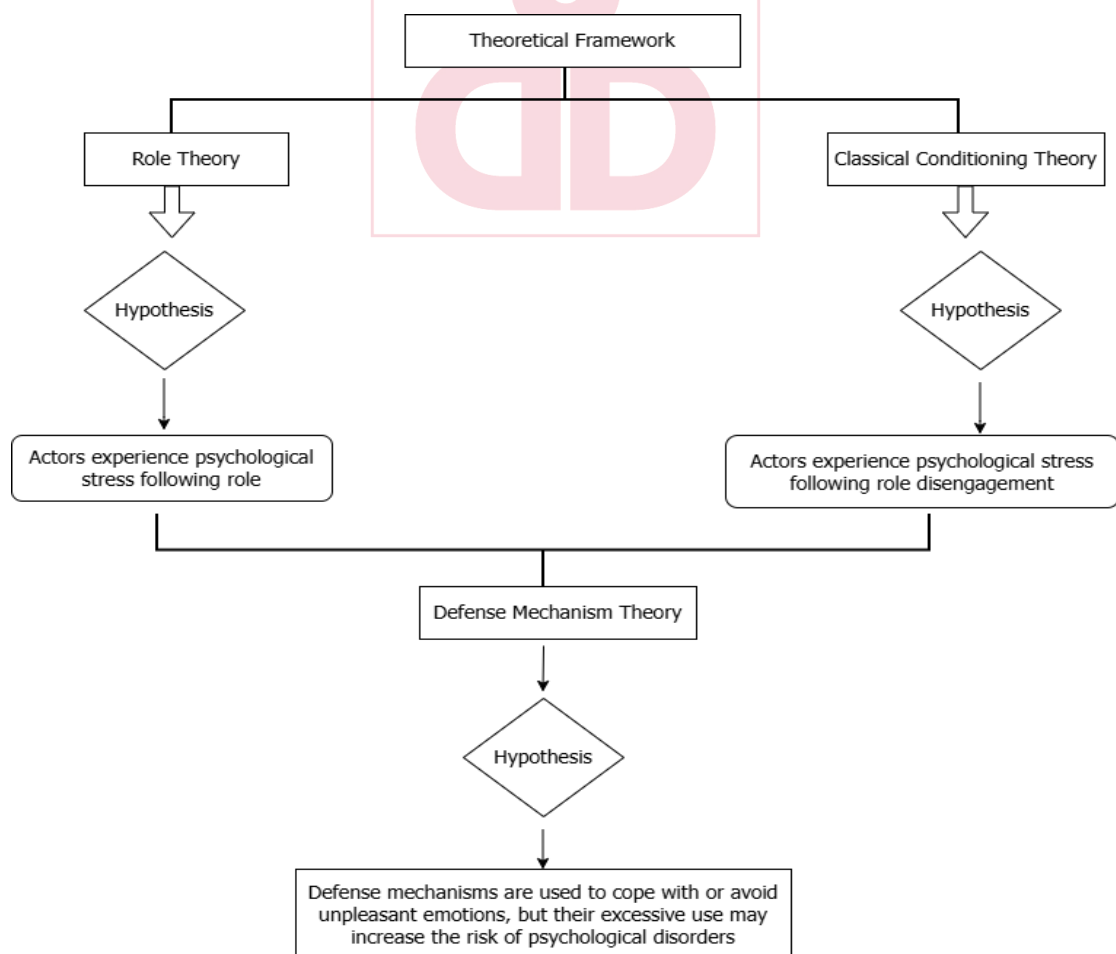


Figure 1. Flow Chart of Theoretical Framework

METHODOLOGY

Utilizing an exploratory research design, this study investigates the structural and psychological changes experienced by Bangladeshi theatre actors as a result of character embodiment. Primary data were collected from actors affiliated with the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Dhaka who portrayed the role of Macbeth in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* between 2010 and the present. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques and subsequently triangulating the findings. Secondary data were obtained from academic books, newspapers, and journal articles, while primary data were collected through 18 Key Informant Interviews (KII), 5 in-depth interviews and structured surveys. Prior to finalizing the questionnaire, a feasibility study was conducted to enhance methodological rigor and ensure the appropriateness of the research instruments.

Given the nature of the research problem and the specificity of the field, a mixed-methods approach was considered most suitable. This chapter presents and analyzes the survey findings in relation to the study objectives, evaluates the overall contributions and limitations of the research, examines the proposed hypotheses, and considers the extent to which the findings align with or diverge from previous scholarship.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 27. Depending on the research objectives, the analyses included demographic profiling, percentage distribution, measures of central tendency, cross-tabulation, independent sample t-tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and correlation analysis. Microsoft Word was utilized for the preparation and writing of the article.

DISCUSSION

Based on the evaluation of the relevant literature, this study appears to be the first conducted within a single national context to examine the mental health conditions of actors portraying *Macbeth*. Drawing on data from 18 participants, it provides important insights into the psychological dimensions of character embodiment associated with performing this role.

All participants were students, positioning the findings primarily within the perspective of the student-actor. Most participants were aged 21–22 years, although other age groups (18–20, 23–24, 25–26, and 27–28 years) were also represented. Considerable acting experience was observed even among younger

participants, suggesting early involvement in theatre despite the absence of a linear relationship between age and experience. The findings indicate a relationship between deep character immersion and psychological stress. Rehearsal schedules were notably intensive, with 38.9% of participants practicing 10–12 hours daily. Such demanding schedules were evident across age groups, reflecting both strong commitment to theatrical practice and substantial psychological involvement.

Participants demonstrated considerable variation in post-performance recovery. While some returned to their usual psychological state within minutes, others required several days or even a week to disengage from the character. These differences appeared unrelated to experience level, suggesting that factors such as individual psychological disposition, depth of immersion, and acting methodology may influence psychological detachment.

Although all participants described portraying *Macbeth* as enjoyable, most rated the experience as highly or very highly enjoyable. This finding indicates that the role's emotional complexity and thematic depth constitute a rewarding artistic challenge regardless of experience level. However, qualitative evidence also revealed the substantial psychological demands associated with embodying the character. One theatre expert reported observing such severe strain during the character-building process that an actor required hospitalization. The expert attributed this to Macbeth's progressive psychological transformation, political trajectory, and persistent internal conflict, all of which demanded sustained emotional and cognitive engagement (Personal communication, 13 March 2025).

Similarly, one participant reported experiencing intense psychological distress while rehearsing Macbeth's remorse after Duncan's murder. To construct the character's guilt, the actor recalled a previous rehearsal incident in which he had accidentally injured a friend, causing a nosebleed. Revisiting this memory generated overwhelming emotional pressure and intensified identification with Macbeth's regret (Personal communication, 16 March 2025). Another key informant described persistent psychological disorientation and difficulty returning to everyday life following the performance (Personal communication, 16 March 2025).

Quantitative findings further demonstrated the challenges of post-performance adjustment. Most participants (72.2%) reported difficulty disengaging from the role, while an identical proportion developed personal coping strategies to facilitate recovery. Nevertheless, 22.2% indicated having no post-performance recovery procedures, suggesting a need for systematic training in psychological detachment. Moreover, 27.8% sought professional mental health

support, and 50% reported enduring ongoing psychological stress. Although approximately 35% resumed normal functioning within minutes, others required hours, days, or up to a week to recover.

Several interview narratives illustrated the lingering psychological effects of portraying Macbeth. One participant described recurrent dreams involving a river of blood, inspired by imagery from the play, which provoked intense fear and distress. The same participant reported unconsciously reciting dialogue during sleep (Personal communication, 24 March 2025). Another actor described an extreme immersion technique undertaken while preparing for Duncan's murder. Seeking to understand Macbeth's psychological state, he obtained animal blood from a market and spent hours sitting alone with blood-covered hands. He later reported that this prolonged exercise contributed to traumatic thoughts, severe headaches, and neck pain (Personal communication, 16 March 2025).

Additional accounts highlighted the psychological intensity of trauma-related scenes. One participant recalled experiencing overwhelming cognitive pressure while enacting Duncan's assassination, accompanied by visible physical strain. During the dagger hallucination scene, he imagined daggers surrounding him on stage and began sweating profusely, describing the experience as psychologically traumatic (Personal communication, 16 March 2025). Another participant reported that emotional memory recall during scenes depicting Macbeth's grief repeatedly evoked memories of a grandmother's death, leading to emotional withdrawal, silence, and depressive feelings (Personal communication, 23 March 2025). These experiences were corroborated by observations from theatre practitioners involved in the rehearsal process.

Less severe but recurrent effects were also reported, including irritability, intrusive thoughts, persistent mental repetition of dialogue, emotional withdrawal from personal relationships, sleep disturbances, involuntary bodily movements during sleep, and temporary changes in behaviour and physical movement following performances (Personal communications, March–April 2025). Collectively, these accounts suggest that psychological immersion in Macbeth may influence emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and interpersonal functioning beyond the stage.

The survey findings further revealed limited formal preparation for managing such experiences. Although only 27.8% of participants had received official mental health training, 83.3% believed psychological awareness could reduce performance-related stress. At the same time, 94.4% had participated in workshops, indicating increasing recognition of mental health issues within

theatre communities. Most participants acknowledged the psychological impact of dialogue (88.9%), excessive character immersion (88.9%), and performance-related anxiety or sleep difficulties (83.3%). Additionally, 72.2% reported emotional distancing from family members or friends, whereas 77.8% found discussing their experiences with others beneficial. Approximately 78% believed that performance-related stress negatively affected interpersonal relationships.

Despite the widespread perception that playing Macbeth was psychologically challenging, the majority of actors found the role to be incredibly satisfying and pleasurable, underscoring the dual nature of theater as both emotionally taxing and professionally rewarding. Bhargava (2023) pointed out that actors often adopt their characters' personality traits during performance, leading to intense emotional responses and potential psychological trauma. For example, after filming *Love Hostel*, actress Sanya Malhotra reportedly sought psychological counseling to detach from her role. Bhargava also noted that intense character portrayal can increase heart rate due to heightened emotional arousal. During an in-depth interview, one participant described an extreme method of character immersion following the murder of Duncan. The character went to a chicken shop to get blood and spent hours sitting by himself in a room with his hands covered in it, repeatedly staring at the blood in order to understand the psychological condition linked with having blood on his hands. He claimed that this prolonged rehearsal process adversely affected his thought patterns leading him into a traumatic psychological state accompanied by severe headaches and neck pain (Personal communication, 16 March 2025).

In evaluating the actor's psychological state during trauma-intensive scenes, one in-depth interviewee provided a thorough description of intense mental and physical strain endured throughout the enactment of Duncan's murder. The informant claimed that while performing the scene of approaching Duncan's assassination, the actor experienced intense cognitive pressure, causing visible swelling of the veins in his head. Furthermore, during the dagger hallucination scene preceding the murder, the actor imagined daggers appearing all around him while performing on stage. As a result, he entered a traumatic psychological state and began sweating profusely on stage (Personal communication, 16 March 2025).

Quantitative analysis indicates that hysteria and trauma related reactions were comparatively uncommon among participants. Only 5.6% reported hysterical symptoms, while 16.7% experienced stress during or after performance. However, previous studies suggest that method acting, particularly emotional memory recall, may produce adverse psychological effects, including hysteria, trauma, emotional exhaustion, depression, cognitive

overload, burnout, and loss of emotional regulation (Townsend, 2009; Arias, 2019; Sammut, 2013 & Franklin, 2021; Lee-Rekers, 2021;). Townsend (2009) described a young actress who developed hysterical symptoms after repeatedly reliving painful memories through emotional recall. Owing to such psychological risks, Anton Chekhov rejected emotional memory-based acting, and Stanislavski later abandoned the technique after recognizing its harmful effects.

Types of psychological stress affected you while playing Macbeth	Values	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Hysteria	No	17	94.4
	Yes	1	5.6
Trauma	No	15	83.3
	Yes	3	16.7
Frustration	No	9	50.0
	Yes	9	50.0
Depression	No	11	61.1
	Yes	7	38.9
Distress	No	7	38.9
	Yes	11	61.1
Anxiety	No	13	72.2
	Yes	5	27.8
Phobias	No	16	88.9
	Yes	2	11.1
Hallucination	No	12	66.7
	Yes	6	33.3

Table 1. A descriptive analysis of Psychological stress experienced during the performance of Macbeth.

Further analysis revealed that depression and psychological distress were more common than severe psychiatric reactions. Although severe psychiatric symptoms were relatively rare, moderate psychological stress, particularly depression, chronic worry and dissociative experiences was common, reflecting the intense emotional immersion required to portray Macbeth.

Franklin (2021) reported that portraying the intoxicated protagonist Fick in *Balm of Gilead* led to deep psychological immersion, causing him to think about the character beyond rehearsals and experience insomnia, depression, emotional withdrawal, anxiety, and prolonged psychological stress. These symptoms correspond to the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* concept of Repetitive Negative Thinking (RNT), which impaired his reasoning, cognitive processing, and memory, leaving him physically and emotionally exhausted. Even after the performance ended, he required considerable time to regain his normal psychological state.

These findings were supported by in-depth interviews. One participant reported experiencing intense depression while portraying Macbeth's psychological collapse after Lady Macbeth's death. Through emotional memory recall, he repeatedly revisited the death of his grandmother, resulting in emotional distress, withdrawal, silence, and emotional numbing (Personal communication, 23 March 2025).

In the same way, the theatre director observing the rehearsal process noted that one actor connected Duncan's murder with his grandmother's death during emotional memory recall, placing him under considerable psychological strain (Personal communication, 12 March 2025). Another participant reported intense depression and despair while portraying Macbeth's guilt after Duncan's murder (Personal communication, 25 March 2025). Several participants explained that sustained cognitive and emotional engagement with Macbeth's inner conflicts including morality, evil, anger, grief, and suffering contributed to depressive reactions (Personal communication, 16 March 2025). One actor also stated that imagining the loss of a loved one while performing Macbeth's response to Lady Macbeth's death intensified his emotional vulnerability, leading to depression and tears during performance (Personal communication, 21 March 2025).

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Mental stress in role	2.4444	1.75641	18
Mental stress after role	1.8333	1.15045	18

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of mental stress in role and mental stress after role.

Correlations			
		Mental stress in role	Mental stress after role
Mental stress in role	Pearson Correlation	1	.650**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003
	N	18	18
Mental stress after role	Pearson Correlation	.650**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	

	N	18	18
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 3. Test of correlation between the mental stress in role and mental stress after role.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine whether psychological stress levels are significantly impacted by deep character immersion. The mean psychological stress scores of performers who reported being fully involved in their roles were compared to those who did not. The findings indicate that deep character immersion is responsible for a statistically significant difference in mean stress scores ($p < .05$). Null Hypothesis 1 was thus disproved. The results reveal that psychological stress during performance and post-performance stress have a moderate to high statistically significant positive connection ($p < .05$). As a consequence, Null Hypothesis 2 is rejected suggesting that increased stress during character enactment is linked to increased stress levels after the role is acted out. Additionally, an independent sample t-test was conducted to determine if performers who were able to psychologically detach themselves from their roles after a performance and those who did not had significantly different mental health awareness scores. The findings illustrate a statistically significant difference between the two groups ($p < .05$) leading to the rejection of Null Hypothesis 3. Data further suggest that actors who are able to psychologically disengage from their characters exhibit higher levels of mental health awareness. This could suggest that actors who are more psychologically aware are better able to detach themselves from their characters and recover after a performance. Another independent sample t-test was used to compare psychological stress scores with actors' belief in the existence of a connection between stress and personal life in order to determine whether there is a significant relationship between actors' psychological stress and their personal lives. According to the findings, performers who think that their personal lives are impacted by psychological stress report much higher levels of stress than those who do not. These results corroborate Hypothesis 4, indicating a statistically significant correlation ($p < .05$) between Personal life and psychological stress. Null Hypothesis 4 was thus disproved.

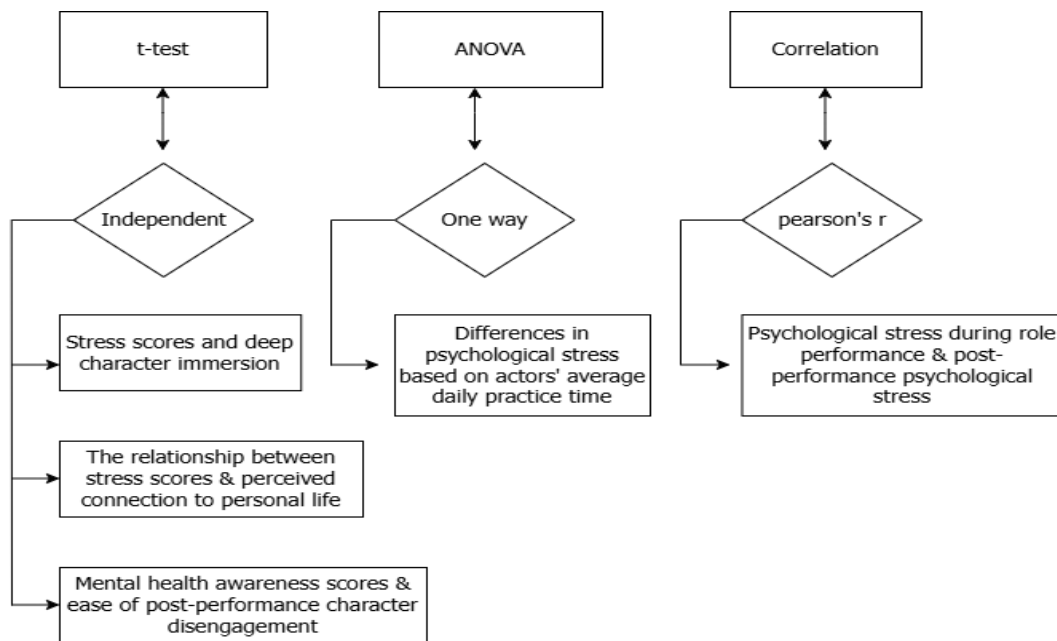


Figure 2. Schematic of Hypotheses

Overall, the findings suggest that portraying Macbeth constitutes both an artistically rewarding and psychologically demanding experience. While participants derived considerable satisfaction from performing the role, the emotional intensity required for its enactment was associated with a range of psychological consequences, from temporary distress and sleep disturbances to prolonged emotional strain. These results underscore the importance of promoting mental health awareness, structured recovery strategies, and supportive practices within theatrical training and performance environments.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study employed an exploratory research approach to investigate the psychological effects of theatrical characters on actors in the context of Bangladeshi theatre practice. Acting is physically and psychologically challenging especially when it comes to portraying intricate dramatic characters. Hence, while playing a character authentically, actors must internalize the character's mental and emotional states, a process that often gives rise to underlying psychological conflicts within the performer. To assess the psychological effects of character embodiment, this study shed light on students from the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Dhaka who played the character of *Macbeth* in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* between 2010 and the present. The research identified and examined the types of psychological stress and challenges actors encountered while inhabiting the role and during their transition back to mundane life after performance. Moreover, the study recommended protective and coping measures to lessen as well as mitigate post-performance psychological effects. The results show that young

actors' mental health is significantly impacted by character-specific demands especially those related to emotionally charged roles like *Macbeth*. Deep character immersion, the use of emotional memory and changes in psychological stress are all substantially influenced by individual psychological disposition, prior preparation and acting technique, according to an analysis of participants experiences. Thus, this study demonstrates performers who fully committed to their roles showed increased levels of psychological stress, anxiety, sadness, and detrimental consequences on their Personal lives.

At the same time, the character embodiment process was observed as emotionally rewarding and professionally satisfying for most participants. Statistical analyses led to the rejection of the null hypotheses and revealed significant relationships between psychological stress, the ability to detach from a character, mental health awareness, and the impact of acting on personal life. Although the study is limited by its student-centered sample and relatively small scale, restricting the generalizability of its findings, it however represents a significant foundational contribution to research on mental health in acting and performance studies within the Bangladeshi context. Future research may expand this field by incorporating larger and more diverse participant groups, professional theatre practitioners, comparative acting methodologies, and interdisciplinary psychological frameworks to further deepen understanding of the long-term mental health implications of character embodiment.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Despite its contributions, this study has several notable shortcomings. Firstly, the research was conducted particularly with actors who portrayed the character of Macbeth in productions staged by the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Dhaka. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to actors involved in other theatrical productions, institutions, or performance contexts. Secondly, it was not feasible to conduct all of the interviews in person because the university was temporarily closed during the data collection time. As a result, some of the interviews were conducted over the phone and using online platforms like Zoom which might have reduced the level of engagement and observation compared to in-person interviews.

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