**An exploratory examination of an ecological model in music therapy for treating adolescents with conduct disorders**

High schools that specialize in at-risk youth often struggle to treat students’ conduct disorders. An innovative model has been developed in one such high school in Tel-Aviv. The ‘therapy guided class’ model is based on the ecological approach in social work and uses family-therapy clinical methods. The therapist (music, art, or movement therapist) treats the class unit and all its components, including the teacher and teaching assistant. In addition to group therapy sessions in each class, additional group therapy sessions for staff take place on a regular basis. The model’s uniqueness lies in the integration between two approaches to therapy – the ecological and the psychodynamic. The therapist treats the whole class unit, instead of referring to the teacher as co-therapist, as practiced in ‘the class as a group’ model.

This study was based on qualitative research methods and included interviews and focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted with teachers, teaching assistants, and therapists, in addition to the school counselor depth interview. Based on the preliminary results of those interviews, two teaching assistant interviews took place along with a focus group for the model developers. The interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were thoroughly examined for repeated themes and subjects.

Our research results show influences in four therapy circles: the student, the class, the staff, and the school system. While some of those influences are perceived as positive and effective, others are perceived as negative and signaling a need for improvement. In the student circle, only positive influences were reported: a holistic view of the youngster and improvement in sharing abilities. In the class circle some positive influences were reported: advancement of class goal, the teacher’s emotional discourse modeling, and alternative mutual encounters among class members. In the same circle, some negative influences were reported as well: conduct disorders disabilities, discipline disruption during creative activities, and unsafe issues processing. In the staff circle some positive influences were reported: guided class improvement, staff ventilation, staff self-improvement, and educational and therapeutic staff cooperation. In the same circle, some negative influences were reported as well: resistance to staff therapy, difficulty working with two staff members, staff burnout, and language disparity. Finally, in the school system circle some positive influences were reported: the ongoing developing model, class staff therapeutic containing, and the therapist as mediator between the administration and the teaching staff. In the same circle, some negative influences were also reported: lack of clarity of the teaching assistant’s position in the school hierarchy and a need for extensive staff preparation to improve their participation in the model.

Five themes tended to recur in the circles and influence one another. In terms of the more emotional approach, one was reported in three circles: the student, the class, and staff. At the system level, insights, skills, and discourses about the emotional aspects of school life took place, which created *emotional class management*. In both the staff and the school system circles, *collaborations* were reported. The nature of participation in the model forced multiple collaborations to occur. Sharing and cooperation among the class staff, between teachers and therapists, and between administration and therapeutic staff promoted a collaborative school environment. In both the staff and the school system circles, therapist empowerment was reported. Successes and trust experiences among the class staff allowed significant processes to occur. Those allowed the administration to expand the therapist’s authority and responsibility, and that required the therapists to improve their work and the model. A *virtuous* *circle* was started, improving the therapeutic work in the model. These three themes were perceived as positive, while two others were perceived as negative. Disorders and attention difficulties were reported in all four circles. Chaos, overflow, and disorganization experiences were perceived as damaging and creating *systematic attention disorder*. Finally, in the class, staff, and school system circles, *communication difficulties* were reported. Language disparity and lack of information sharing between different staff groups at the school were expressed in the model work and harmed it.

The recurrence of the aforementioned themes in the four therapy circles highlights the ecological view, which emphasizes the mutual influence of the various factors on the therapy at the high school in question. Understanding and constructing this model might enable improvement of the model and allow the model to be applied in schools that struggle with similar issues. This model is still developing, and further research is required for its coherent formation. Further studies could examine the model after its completion and describe its effects from different points of view: first the adolescents themselves and then other schools for conduct disorders.