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

High schools that specialize in at-risk youth often struggle to treat their conduct disorders. An innovative model has been developed in such a high school in Tel-Aviv. "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. Except for group therapy sessions in each class, additional staff-group therapy sessions take place on a regular basis. What constitutes the model uniqueness is the integration between two approaches to therapy – the ecological and the psychodynamic. The therapist treats the whole class unit, instead of referring 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 where conducted with teachers, teaching assistants and therapists, additionally to the school counselor depth interview. According to the preliminary results of those interviews, two teaching assistant interviews took place as well as focus group for the model developers. Interviews and focus groups have been recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were thoroughly examined for repeated themes and subjects.

Our research results discover 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 precepted as negative and improvement required. In the student circle positive influences have been reported only: A holistic view on the youngster and sharing abilities improvement. In the class circle some positive influences have been reported: Class goals advancement, teacher's emotional discourse modeling and alternative mutual encounter among class members. In the same circle, some negative influences have been reported as well: Conduct disorders disabilities, discipline disruption while creative activities and un-safe issues processing. In the staff circle some positive influences have been reported: Guided class improvement, staff ventilation, staff self-improvement and educational and therapeutic staff cooperation. In the same circle, some negative influences have been reported as well: Agreement for staff therapy, difficulty working with two staff members, staff burnout and disparity of languages. Finally, in the school system circle some positive influences have been reported: On-going developing model, class staff therapeutic containing and the therapist as mediator between management and educational staff. In the same circle, some negative influences have been reported as well: Dis-clarity of the teaching assistant intention in school hierarchy and need for extensive staff preparation to improve their participation in the model.

Five themes found recurring in the circles in mutual influence. Moving from behavioral approach to more emotional one reported in three circles: The student, the class and staff. In system view, insights, skills and discourses at the emotional parts of the school life took place, which created *emotional class management*. Recurrent in the staff and the school system circles *collaborations* have been reported. The nature of participation in the model forced multiple collaborations to occur. Sharing and cooperation in the class staff, between teachers and therapists and between management and therapeutic staff promoted collaborative school environment. Recurrent in the staff and the school system circles, therapist's empowerment has been reported. Successes and trust experiences among the class staff allowed significant processes to occur. Those allowed the management to expand therapist's authority and responsibility, which oblige therapists to improve their work and the model. *A positive vicious* *circle* was started, improving the therapeutic work at the model. Those three themes perceived as positive, while two others perceived as negative. Disorders and attention difficulties have been reported at all four circles. Chaos, overflow and disorganization experiences perceived as damaging and creating *systematic attention disorder*. Finally, in the class, staff and the school system circles *communication difficulties* have been reported. Disparity of languages and lack of information sharing between different staffs at school expressed in the model work and harmed it.

Recurrence of those themes in the four therapy circless stress the ecological view which emphasize the mutual influence of the various factors on the therapy at the high school. Understanding and constructing this model might enable improvement of the model and apply applications of the model in schools that struggle with similar issues. This model is still developing, and further research required for its coherent formation. Further studies could examine the model after its completion as well as describe its effects from different point of views: First the youngsters themselves and then other schools for conduct disorders.