Noise of battle and therapy sounds: Group music therapy with post-traumatized soldiers

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What is Music Therapy?

A process in which three agents take part: patient, therapist and music. The usage the therapist and the patient do with the music elements and the connections established between them lead to wanted changes and better health. The therapist must have appropriate personality traits: the ability to empathize and listen, creativity and sensitivity. The patient is the one who asks for help due to stress, crises, physical, mental, behavioral, social or spiritual difficulties (Amir, 1999).
About music therapy:

- Passive or active patient, use of known music, improvisation.
- Music as a reflection of personality, life style, ‘here and now’.
- Music as a medium for change.
- Therapy in Music vs. Music as Therapy – different approaches.
- The therapist must relate to the music components: rhythm, melody, harmony, intensity, pitch of sound and timbre.
Why Music Therapy with PTSD?

- In general, sensorial experiences are processed in the right hemisphere, therefore, a traumatic event, which is an intense sensorial experience, is processed in the right hemisphere.
- Music as a sensorial experience is also processed in the right hemisphere.
- On the other hand, the speech, as an analytical process, is processed apparently in the left hemisphere (Sifneos, 1973).
- Studies also show that post-traumatized people suffer from an inability to translate emotions into words (Yehuda et al., 1997; Zlotnick, Mattia, & Zimmerman, 2001).
- Therefore, Music Therapy might function as a means of approaching traumatic memories while detouring linguistic and logical mediation.
The pendulation theory of Levine*

The pendulation process

Levine uses the word pendulation for describing the movement of a pendulum – as is in a clock. This metaphor is used in order to describe a process of several movements from exposure (trauma vortex) to relaxation (healing vortex) in the process of healing from PTSD.

The pendulation process

- Not engaging in trauma
- Engaging in trauma

Total time
Treatment stage

1 2 3 4
Method

Mixed Methods: Quantitative and qualitative measurements.

Participants:

**Guy** - was severely wounded in his thigh during a battle where he witnessed the death of his friend.

**Jonathan** - was on a bus heading to his camp with his father and three more friends who were all killed during a suicide attack on the bus. He himself flew out of the bus and suffered from burns and a broken leg.

**Oren** - was asked to identify three of his dead friends right after a deadly combat incident.

**Yaron** – as a sniper killed two terrorists from a short distance and saw their last expressions.

**Yariv** - sat at a coffee shop with a friend when a suicide bomber blew himself up nearby. While helping those injured he saw unbearable sights.

**Tomer** - his thigh was severely injured during a combat incident where two of his friends were killed.
Data Collection:
- Two digital cameras
- Open interviews
- A self-report of the therapist-researcher

Data Analysis:
- Content analysis of interviews and the sessions.
- Duration of playing each instrument.
- Rhythms analysis:

- Improvisations analysis:
Procedure:

The treatment took place in the Unit for Combat Stress Reactions of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). It lasted four months, once a week and each session lasted 90 minutes. Playing and talking during sessions was spontaneous except the last 10 to 15 minutes of each session which were dedicated to listening to relaxing music.
Results reflecting the pendulation process

First stage: Intense engagement in trauma

- The longest length of time in which the group discussed traumatic issues.
- The highest number of unpleasant associations, memories, feelings and emotions in relation to trauma which were evoked while playing on metal instruments.
- The longest length of time in which the group invested in playing on metal instruments.

But WHY METAL INSTRUMENTS????
Differentiation between metallic and wooden instruments

Jonathan: Metal.. Metal has a gross sound. Too heavy.. It is not pleasant to the ears especially when one is relaxed. Oren: Yes! Jonathan is right! Metal is destructive. It is harder than flesh. It is something that hurts, destroys. Yaron: Yeh, wood is more gentle, more natural, it is an organism, it resembles human beings more than the Tibetan bowl, for example. Yariv: Wooden instruments produce much more soothing sounds, much more restful. I cannot bear these metallic instruments, they just drive me crazy!
Video clip – metallic improvisation
**Second stage**: Certain motion towards relaxation and normality

Significant decrease in engaging in traumatic aspects and involvement in issues which are not related to trauma:

- High length of time in which the group discussed non-traumatic issues.

- Sharp increase in the number of pleasant associations, memories, feelings and emotions which were evoked while playing on wooden instruments.

- Sharp increase in the length of time the group dedicated to playing on wooden instruments.
Third stage: Moderate engagement in trauma

A relative increase in engagement in traumatic aspects compared to the second stage:

- More time dedicated to talking about traumatic issues.
- More time invested in playing on metal instruments.
- Frequent group drumming in a very loud volume (forte-fortissimo-fff) served as an outlet for rage.
Video clip – intensive group drumming
The meaning of intense group drumming

”We might be attracted to the drums because one has to hit it. It takes out all the rage!! When you hit something, you beat it. You don’t do something gentle, you beat it with a temper. You make a noise and then you feel a sense of relief. I think that is what makes drumming so attractive to us”” (Guy).
Fourth stage: A clear tendency towards relaxation and normality

A massive decrease in the group’s engagement in traumatic aspects:

- The **longest** length of time in which the group discussed non-traumatic issues.
- The **longest** length of time in which the group invested in playing on wooden instruments and **very little** time dedicated to playing on metal instruments.
- The **highest** number of pleasant associations, memories, feelings and emotions which were evoked while playing on wooden instruments.
- The members express for the first time an optimistic approach toward their future.
- The **highest** number of members falling asleep while listening to relaxing music.
Video clip – relaxing music
THE END!