

## REPORT

Special Feature | Music therapy in dementia and end-of-life care: Mediterranean perspectives

# Music therapy in dementia and end-of-life care: A report from Israel

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### ABSTRACT

Music therapy was formalised in Israel in the early 1980s with the opening of academic training programmes, and has developed tremendously since then, with approximately 700 music therapists listed. While still fighting for legislative status as a profession, music therapists work with diverse populations in different settings. The latest national survey revealed therapists prefer to work with children or adolescents and are less enthusiastic about working with older adults (only 5.8%). This is a serious concern due to the growing numbers and needs of the elderly population in the country. There are approximately 150,000 people with dementia, and the need for non-pharmacological treatment highlights the importance of music and the demand for music therapists. In recent years, music therapy training programmes have placed more emphasis on working with the elderly than they did in the past. This change has occurred gradually due to increasing need in the field, more awareness of age-related conditions, and also due to the fact that more faculty members have expertise in these fields. Nowadays, more music therapists have started working with people with dementia, and more music therapy research students choose to focus on the topic in their work. The scope of palliative services provided in Israel has also been improved in recent years, but it is still limited. Considering the needs of the population, it is important to further develop the field of music therapy in the care of elders in Israel.

### KEYWORDS

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### INTRODUCTION

The development of special care services for older adults in Israel has increased in the past couple of years, and therefore so has the need for professionals. Music therapy is gradually

gaining recognition in care facilities and more job opportunities are available for music therapists. This report describes the development of the field of music therapy in Israel from the pioneering training programmes to its current status, and, in particular, the work done in the field of music therapy in dementia and end-of-life care. I draw on my experience as a music therapist working in the field of dementia care. Over the past 23 years, I have had the privilege of taking part in incorporating music therapy into various care facilities, leading music-based programmes for caregivers, and educating professionals in the field of geriatrics, as well as music therapists in academic training programmes.

The report includes three parts: The first part covers music therapy as a profession regarding the development of training programmes, the clinical trends of music therapists, and the work in multicultural society. The second part covers the development of gerontology and the work done by music therapists in dementia care and end-of-life in long-term care facilities and at home. The concluding third part sets out the challenges and goals for the field in future years in both clinical work and research.

## MUSIC THERAPY IN ISRAEL

### Training programmes and professional organisation

Music therapy in Israel was formalised in the early 1980s, when three training programmes were founded: (1) the music therapy programme at David Yellin College of Education, founded by Chava Sekeles; (2) the music therapy programme at Bar-Ilan University, founded by Dorit Amir; and (3) the music and dance therapy programme at Levinsky College, founded by Dalia Razin (Goodman, 2011). The founders of the training programmes studied abroad and integrated their knowledge with the professional and cultural adjustment and needs of the country. The programmes were shaped according to their clinical orientation, and they were mostly influenced by North European and North American music therapy (Amir, 2001).

The field of music therapy in Israel is very dynamic, encompassing some important changes during the past decade. First, all programmes evolved from granting a post-baccalaureate diploma to granting a full master's degree. Second, a fourth music therapy programme was founded at Haifa University, headed by Cochavit Elefant. Finally, in 2012, a programme for ultra-orthodox women headed by Avi Gilboa was founded and operated until 2018. This programme was a branch of the Bar-Ilan programme, so it was directly influenced by Bar-Ilan's curricula, but cultural adjustments were made for the students, who came from a strictly religious cultural background (Weiss et al., 2017).

Music therapy and other art modalities (visual arts, dance and movement, drama therapy, psychodrama and bibliotherapy) are part of the Israeli Association of Creative and Expressive Therapies – ICET (YAHAT). The association was registered as a non-profit organisation in 1971 by a small group of creative arts therapists who wanted to promote the

profession in Israel. It has been the only official association of the arts therapies in Israel since then. The association has been in the continuous process of developing professional standards, and, currently, one of its main challenges is promoting regulation. The regulation of health professions law in Israel does not include creative arts therapies, and thus the profession currently lacks a legal basis for licensure (YAHAT, n.d.).

### Clinical trends of Israeli music therapists

To date, there are approximately 700 music therapists working in Israel in various clinical settings. Most of them work within Ministry of Education schools, kindergartens, and special education centres, and others within Ministry of Health hospitals and treatment centres (Goodman, 2011; Gottfried, 2015). Israeli music therapists participate and present their work regularly in international and regional conferences (Amir, 2001), and Israel is an active member of the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC, n.d.).

A survey conducted in 2017 in Israel (Weiss et al., 2017) addressed music therapists' fields of interest and their clinical and theoretical orientation. A total of 107 music therapists took the survey. Of the 107 respondents, 48 had more than 8 years' experience (More Experienced Music Therapists-MEMT) and 57 had less than 8 years' experience (Less Experienced Music Therapists-LEMT). Data was organised in an SPSS data file. An independent t-test revealed significant differences between MEMTs and LEMTs in almost all fields of inquiry. Generally, the LEMTs are open to more music therapy techniques, are proficient with more instruments, and use more music in their work. Regarding the clinical populations that were most preferred by the respondents, a chi-square analysis showed that the differences between the preferences of MEMTs and LEMT were significant. While the MEMTs mostly preferred working with children (52.1%) and dealing with emotional disabilities (50.0%), the LEMTs were more flexible regarding their preferred age groups: toddlers (33.3%), children (26.3%), and adolescents (22.8%), and regarding their preferred clientele groups: emotional disabilities (29.3%) and autism (29.3%). Both MEMTs and LEMTs were less enthusiastic about working with older adults (5.8%). This is a serious concern due to the growing numbers and needs of potential clients in this age group (Weiss et al., 2017).

### Music therapy in a multicultural society

Part of the challenges of working with older adults is dealing with cultural diversity, which is also manifested in colliding music preferences. Israel is a multicultural country with numerous ethnic and cultural groups, and continuous immigration. As music therapists, we deal with cultural dilemmas and need to look at our clients from a cultural perspective and understand the cultural patterns of our client's identity (Amir, 2001). Gilboa (2015) stresses

the importance of equipping music therapists in training programmes with adequate tools to deal with the complex challenges that multiculturalism raises, especially in fieldwork.

In the past decade, outstanding community music therapy projects addressing the issues of different cultural groups have emerged in Israel. These projects were created and developed at Bar-Ilan University and aim to promote communication between conflicting groups. *Let's Talk Music* is a community-oriented music therapy group that was developed to promote and enhance dialogue between Arab and Jewish students (Gilboa & Salman, 2018), and *Musical Dialogue* – a community-oriented music therapy group that was created in response to the religious conflict and tension between various sectors in the city of Beit-Shemesh (Baruch, 2017). Both projects are continuously growing and developing to address other conflicting groups in a multicultural country. One of its offspring was a musical dialogue group for older adults who have immigrated to Israel from different countries and bring to the group diverse cultural backgrounds.

## MUSIC THERAPY IN DEMENTIA AND END-OF-LIFE CARE

### Gerontology and geriatrics in Israel

The field of gerontology (the study of aging) is growing rapidly in Israel. Israel Gerontological Society (IGS) was already established in 1956, witnessing a phenomenal, unprecedented rate of population aging in Israel and worldwide. This demographic change has specific characteristics in Israel. During the past 50 years, Israeli society has undergone an intensive aging process, where the rate of the elderly has increased from 4% in the 1950s to about 11% of the population in 2015 (the total population of Israel in 2015 was 8.46 million). IGS is a voluntary organisation that serves as a framework for research and academic institutions, organisations, services and agencies dealing with the issue of aging in Israel. IGS is a member of the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics and is active in its European section (Israel Gerontological Society, n.d.).

The population projections expect the number of elders in Israel to reach 1.66 million in 2035. This means that the elderly population will increase by 77% between 2015 and 2035, and the growth rate will be 2.2 times faster than that of the general population at that time. The increasing numbers of elders and care facilities raise the demand for professional staff. In 2017, there were 330 long-term care facilities (28,000 beds) for disabled elders and people with dementia (Brodsky et al., 2017).

Some professions such as nursing, physiotherapy, social work, and occupational therapy have legislative status with the Ministry of Health and, therefore, these professions are already integrated in the geriatric field in Israel. The lack of legislative status for music therapy results in only few music therapists working with this population. Weiss et al.'s survey (2017) highlighted the need to develop and promote the field of geriatrics among

music therapists. Although more focus is placed on this field in some of the music therapy training programmes in Israel (e.g. a course about music and older adults), and in placements in retirement homes, there is definitely a lot more that needs to be done (Dassa, 2012).

### Music therapy in care facilities

Today, according to EMDA – the Alzheimer's Association of Israel, there are approximately 150,000 people with dementia in Israel (EMDA, n.d.). The tremendous need for non-pharmacological treatment for people with dementia particularly highlights the importance of music. A vast corpus of research deals with the impact of music on people with dementia (Baird & Samson, 2015; Baird & Thompson, 2018; McDermott et al., 2013; Raglio et al., 2014). Music revives memories and promotes engagement and social interaction (Coomans, 2016; Dassa & Amir, 2014; Evans et al., 2019). Implementing music therapy and music-based interventions among caregivers and people with dementia can help caregivers communicate with their care recipient and alleviate agitation during daily care tasks (Hanser et al., 2011; Ray et al., 2016; Ray & Fitzsimmons, 2014; Särkämö et al., 2014).

In recent years, increasingly more care facilities and nursing homes in Israel have discovered the benefits of music. Music therapy was positively mentioned in the committee's report following the Israeli 'consensus conference' for non-pharmacological treatment for people with dementia in 2014. Committee members included representatives of EMDA, expert academic researchers, and diverse field professionals (EMDA, 2014). Today, more music therapists have started working with people with dementia; however, with increasing need, this population remains underserved.

### Training music therapists to work with elders

As stated above, most music therapists work with children and have little resources and knowledge regarding music therapy with elders. It is important to train music therapists to work with elders in general, and people with dementia or other age-related challenges in particular.

A qualitative study from Australia (Webb et al., 2015) revealed an important aspect regarding the reluctance of professionals to work with elders: The main barrier among practitioners from the disciplines of social work and psychology related to lack of professional academic studies in the field. Faculty members did not feel knowledgeable in the field of gerontology and were therefore not able to educate students in this field. In recent years, music therapy training programmes have placed more emphasis on working

with the elderly than in the past. This change has occurred gradually due to increasing need in the field, more awareness to age-related conditions, and also due to the fact that more faculty members have expertise in these fields. More fieldwork during training is done in various geriatric facilities, but it is still scarce due to the fact that there are only very few experienced music therapists in the field of geriatrics that can serve as supervisors.

### Music therapy for Holocaust survivors

A unique group of elders in Israel are Holocaust survivors. According to updated 2016 data, some 200,000 Holocaust survivors aged 70+ were living in Israel that year – almost a third of all people in that age cohort. The Holocaust survivors are older than the total elderly population in Israel (Brodsky et al., 2017). This indicates that this age group might be more prone to old-age challenges at this stage. With an average age of 85, this community of survivors were children during the Holocaust. The effects of the trauma they suffered in their youth is aggravated by the loss of physical and mental faculties as they age. Advanced age also causes the traumatic events of the past to be revisited in the mind, along with the associated stress of reliving those experiences (JDC Israel Eshel, n.d.).

Music therapy research pertaining to this population was conducted by Israeli music therapists: Fischer's (2014) research investigated the purpose and functionality of music for Holocaust survivors during the Second World War and how it helped them cope with the trauma. Music served as a means by which Holocaust survivors gained inner strength and also helped them share their experiences with their families and friends, thus aiding them to come to terms with their trauma and loss. Druks and Amir's (2014) research revealed the power of musical experiences in a music therapy group. Singing, listening to relaxing classical music, and improvisation helped the participants to process painful and complex issues. It also provided a space that enabled them to feel relaxed and accepted, and where they could experience playfulness and spontaneity.

Holocaust survivors in Israel receive services through Israeli government agencies, however, these services lack social and therapeutic support. Support is promoted by organisations such as AMCHA, which is the largest provider of mental health and social support services for Holocaust survivors in Israel. AMCHA offers professional interventions through rehabilitation clubs and also for homebound survivors (AMCHA, n.d.). Additionally, Eshel – Association for the Planning and Development of Services for the Aged in Israel (JDC Israel Eshel, n.d.), and Elah – the centre for coping with loss (Elah, n.d.) both also lead initiatives on a national level. Both AMCHA and Elah provide creative arts therapies; particularly, music therapy for Holocaust survivors with dementia. The work is done mostly in home environments but also in some care facilities and social clubs in a group format (AMCHA, n.d.; Elah, n.d.).

## Music therapy in home care and end-of-life care

The policy of the health and welfare services in Israel advocates postponing placement in care facilities for as long as possible, hence it provides various community services to support the elders' needs at home. Most elders receive different treatments and services in the community. In 2016, there were approximately 28,000 elders (disabled elders and people with dementia) hospitalised in various care facilities (Brodsky et al., 2017). Considering the fact that approximately 150,000 elders cope with dementia in Israel, it is apparent that assistance is needed for both the individuals and their caregivers in the home setting.

Home-based music therapy has gradually become more well-known, and family members are seeking the help of music therapists for their loved ones. In some cases, the music therapists provide care to people in late-stage dementia and also support family members in end-of-life situations. Some organisations like Melabev provide services for those who are confined to their homes due to dementia or other age-related difficulties. The services include diverse activities, including individual sessions of music therapy or other arts therapies for people with dementia at home (Melabev, n.d.).

The scope of palliative services provided in Israel has improved in recent years, but it is still limited considering the needs of the population. There is a national programme for palliative care initiated by the Ministry of Health, Joint Israel-Eshel and Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (Ministry of Health, n.d.). The committee's report does not yet include a recommendation for music therapy services in this case. But the recognition in the field of the importance of music in palliative care is gradually becoming evident. While limited in number, there are music therapists working in hospice care.

## Music used as an aid by caregivers

Due to the growing need, it is also important to find ways to make music accessible as a simple and everyday tool that can help in the daily care of people with dementia. Dealing with dementia is stressful for the people affected, including their families and informal caregivers. The caregiver's physical, mental health, social relationships and wellbeing are affected (Birkenhäger-Gillesse et al., 2018; McAuliffe et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to provide support for people with dementia and their caregivers.

Here, it is important to differentiate between music therapy as a professional practice and music used as an aid by caregivers. Music used as a caregiving aid does not aim towards the development of a therapeutic relationship, and the interaction does not involve a focus on psychological processes. Also, it requires no musical experience from the caregiver. Music therapists can train and guide caregivers in the process of integrating music into daily care (Ray et al., 2016).

In 2015, in collaboration with EMDA, I developed a training programme for caregivers to incorporate music into the daily care of people with dementia. The programme aimed to assist the caregivers, whether professional staff in care facilities or family members at home, in their day-to-day tasks dealing with challenging behaviours. The project was conducted in three stages:

- Stage 1: Training caregivers and relatives on how to use music during the daily care of people with dementia (pilot);
- Stage 2: Training professionals from various fields (occupational therapy, social work, etc.) so that they could instruct caregivers and relatives on how to use music in the day-to-day care of people with dementia;
- Stage 3: Training groups of caregivers and relatives of people with dementia on using music by professionals that were trained for this nationwide (20 groups have been conducted during 2015-2016 in various care settings, with approximately 15-20 participants in each group and a total of approximately 350 caregivers).

The dialogue vis-à-vis the professionals in the field, and the participants' reactions, made it possible to examine the main achievements of the training: 1) The training imparted a new practice that has the power to alleviate the burden of caring for the patient; 2) The training emphasised the power of music to improve mood and relieve stress; and 3) The training also served as a place for individual support (Dassa & Blum, 2016).

## LOOKING FORWARD

To conclude, it is important to develop the field of music therapy and other art modalities in the care of elders in Israel. This involves training music therapists and supporting and promoting the recruitment of music and other arts therapists to work with elders in care facilities and at home. This is possible in training programmes, in developing a continuous professional development course for music therapists to gain expertise in the field, and through increasing awareness among geriatric professionals and policymakers about the benefits of music therapy. No less important is continuing to educate diverse professionals, caregivers, and family members about the impact of music on challenging behaviours and other age-related difficulties that people with dementia may present. Also, it is important to develop more training programmes for caregivers that will help them integrate music into daily care in long-term facilities and at home.

Research on music therapy with elders, and specifically with people with dementia, is gradually developing in Israel (Dassa, 2018; Dassa & Amir, 2014; Dassa & Blum, 2016; Dassa & Harel, 2019a, 2019b), and more music therapy training programmes' students choose to focus on the topic in their work – from research seminars, through thesis, and even doctoral



students. Their research explores various topics such as home-based music therapy for people with dementia, the role of songs in the treatment of people with dementia, and reminiscence through songs.

Promoting research is crucial for advocating the benefits of music therapy and encouraging its inclusion as part of the various national programmes for elders with dementia. This calls for more randomised controlled trials in the field to establish the impact of music on different aspects in coping with dementia. It is also important to address issues of end-of-life care and promote research on the impact of music as a supporting tool. Research should also focus on the way we can successfully integrate music in daily care with the help and guidance of music therapists. The challenges of caregiving are demanding and can be overwhelming. Music can be a key factor in helping caregivers deal with these stressors.

Music therapy training programmes can help to promote the development of this field through specific courses, fieldwork and research. I believe that this will eventually lead to more music therapists who choose to work with the elderly and people with dementia, and will help to further establish the discipline among other professions in the field.

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## Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

# Η μουσικοθεραπεία στην άνοια και την φροντίδα στο τέλος της ζωής: Μια αναφορά από το Ισραήλ

Ayelet Dassa

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η μουσικοθεραπεία διαμορφώθηκε ως κλάδος στο Ισραήλ στις αρχές της δεκαετίας του 1980 με την έναρξη ακαδημαϊκών προγραμμάτων κατάρτισης, και έκτοτε έχει αναπτυχθεί σημαντικά, με εγγεγραμμένους περίπου 700 μουσικοθεραπευτές. Ενώ εξακολουθούν να αγωνίζονται για τη νομοθετική κατοχύρωση του επαγγέλματος, οι μουσικοθεραπευτές εργάζονται με διαφορετικές πληθυσμιακές ομάδες σε ποικίλα πλαίσια. Σύμφωνα με την πιο πρόσφατη δημοσκόπηση σε εθνικό επίπεδο, οι θεραπευτές προτιμούν να εργάζονται με παιδιά ή εφήβους, ενώ είναι λιγότερο

ενθουσιώδεις στο να δουλεύουν με ηλικιωμένους ενήλικες (μόνο το 5,8%). Αυτό εγείρει έντονο προβληματισμό δεδομένου του αυξανόμενου αριθμού και των αναγκών των ηλικιωμένων στην χώρα. Υπάρχουν περίπου 150.000 άτομα με άνοια, και η ανάγκη για μη φαρμακολογική θεραπεία κάνει εντονότερη τη σημασία της μουσικής και τη ζήτηση για μουσικοθεραπευτές. Τα τελευταία χρόνια, τα εκπαιδευτικά προγράμματα μουσικοθεραπείας έχουν δώσει μεγαλύτερη έμφαση στην εργασία με τους ηλικιωμένους από ό,τι στο παρελθόν. Η αλλαγή αυτή έχει συμβεί σταδιακά λόγω της αυξανόμενης ανάγκης στον τομέα, της μεγαλύτερης ευαισθητοποίησης σχετικά με τις παθήσεις που σχετίζονται με αυτή την ηλικία, καθώς και λόγω του μεγαλύτερου αριθμού ακαδημαϊκών με εμπειρία σε αυτά τα πεδία. Σήμερα, περισσότεροι μουσικοθεραπευτές έχουν αρχίσει να εργάζονται με άτομα με άνοια, και περισσότεροι φοιτητές μουσικοθεραπείας επιλέγουν να επικεντρωθούν σε αυτό το θέμα στην ερευνητική τους εργασία. Το πεδίο εφαρμογής των υπηρεσιών ανακουφιστικής φροντίδας που παρέχονται στο Ισραήλ έχει επίσης βελτιωθεί τα τελευταία χρόνια, αλλά εξακολουθεί να είναι περιορισμένο. Λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τις ανάγκες του πληθυσμού, είναι σημαντικό να αναπτυχθεί περαιτέρω ο τομέας της μουσικοθεραπείας στη φροντίδα των ηλικιωμένων στο Ισραήλ.

## ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ

μουσικοθεραπεία, αναφορά, Ισραήλ, άνοια, φροντίδα στο τέλος της ζωής [end-of-life care]