

Working with feelings in music therapy in a family exposed to domestic violence.

This master's thesis is a case study of a course of six music therapy sessions with a family exposed to domestic violence.

Domestic violence is subject to many taboos. Thus, it is difficult to account for the exact extent of violence against children. According to several Danish surveys and investigations, annually between 4 and 20 per cent of children are exposed to violence within the family, and between 5 and 12 per cent witness violence in the family.

Practically every child in families where the mother has been exposed to violence has witnessed the violence against their mother. Violence has happened repeatedly and often through most of the life of the child. It is just as traumatizing for children to witness domestic violence as it is to be exposed to it themselves.

The background for this thesis is my 10th semester internship consisting of 4 months of work in a facility for family counselling in a Danish municipality.

From the beginning, there was a framework for the sessions: Starting with a song containing words for 'welcome' from the family's mother tongue and ending with a Danish song about how time is wasted if we do not play and laugh. In the sessions activities around feelings progressed from improvising over feelings in general, - with no special connections to the life of the family, through sensing feelings in the body, onto the final session where the mother and the two boys each related a story from the life of the family, attached a feeling to this, and we then improvised over it.

The research question for the study:

How, in a short-term course of sessions of music therapy, to get a mother and two children from a family exposed to domestic violence to communicate and share their feelings?

Through an auditive analysis of selected improvisations involving Stern's concept of 'dynamic forms of vitality' I will investigate if and how the family members' openness to feelings, and their contact to each other as well as to me as a therapist were facilitated by improvisation.

The method of analysis was developed along the way in an emergent design by integrating two methods of auditive analysis "Intensive Listening" (Christensen, 2005) and "Therapists' subjective bias table" (TSBT) (Cohen, Gilboa, Bergstrøm-Nielsen, Leder & Milstein, 2012) leading on to applying Daniel Stern's concept of 'forms of vitality' (Stern, 2010).

Three improvisations from the course of therapy were analyzed. One from the second session and two from the last session.

Contents in main points:

Part 1. Presentation of the family. On domestic violence in general.

Part 2. Hermeneutic method. Personal experience from family life. Ethics. View of music.

Part 3. Course of sessions with the family. Description of selected activities. Method of analysis.

Part 4. Family Music Therapy & domestic violence. Forms of vitality. MT & forms of vitality.

Part 5. Empiricism. Analysis of the three improvisations.

Part 6. Discussion of method of analysis and findings. Conclusion. Perspective.

The findings include: matching (affective attunements), mismatches, animating, and synchronicity.

The conclusion is that contact to the therapist was facilitated by reading and matching the vitality forms, and holding and containing the large fluctuations in arousal from the improvisations in the first sessions through to the last one. Thereby the field of intersubjectivity was gradually expanded and everyone had the opportunity to communicate and share feelings. Moreover, there are many examples where the family matched each other during the improvisations, which also contributed to the expansion of the field of intersubjectivity.

The course of sessions has been so short that changes most likely is of a temporary nature, and it is not possible to determine whether this course of sessions will affect the family in the future.

Domestic violence causes trauma, which may take years to come to terms with.

The large extent of violence against children in Danish families shows the importance of offering therapeutic intervention for this group.

Taboo and the adhering silence about violence mean that the non-verbal approach in music therapy can be a useful means of treatment. There is still a lack of research in music therapy with families exposed to domestic violence.

'Forms of Vitality' is a well-known concept among music therapists, but there is little research in this field. The method of analysis proposed in this thesis may be useful in research with other types of clients as well.

Keywords: Family Music Therapy, domestic violence, matching (affective attunement), intersubjectivity, mismatch, animating, synchronicity, forms of vitality, arousal, improvisation.