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**THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHERS WORKING WITH AT- RISK**  
**YOUTH IN ISRAEL**

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*Abstract*

Over the years in Israel, there have been many attempts to describe, in various names and nicknames, the dropout and disconnection of the youth population from the educational frameworks provided by the society to the peer group. However, in 2006, the definition of "at-risk youth" was established by the Schmid Commission, which is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the accepted definitions in professional literature and among policymakers in Israel. As a result, due to the different characteristics and needs of these students, there is a constant need of training for the professionals that deals with this population; the lack of multidisciplinary skills and new professional knowledge that were not part of the initial training, face many challenges and must be the goals for rethinking the continuous training program. Given this, a central question arises as to the emotional and professional effects of working with at-risk youth on teachers and how do they affect student success in the system? As the literature suggests, student success depends on teachers' ability to influence behavior, emotionally, educationally and socially. In light of this, it can be concluded that teacher training that includes the emotional and professional aspect will contribute to the educational team to develop effective work approaches and to develop a high sense of self-ability in the system.

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## 1. Introduction

This article addresses the pedagogical and emotional difficulties of teachers attending at-risk youth schools in Israel. The subject of children and adolescents in central Israel, who draws from various sources and fields of specialization: developmental and social psychology, social work, sociology, anthropology, education, criminology, law and economics. These disciplines explain and define the phenomenon according to their field of knowledge, with each field addressing a topic differently from theoretical, educational and therapeutic goals and not necessarily combining them. Additionally, there is still no definite definition for the subject. The lack of precise definition and characteristics of this population affects the way in which treatment and education are concerned, as well as the areas of occupation and the role of those engaged in it. In formal education and informal education, if these differ in their educational-therapeutic-pedagogical concept. There are many issues in the training of at-risk youth teachers and in light of this, interdisciplinary knowledge must be integrated. The problem this article addresses is that not all teachers working in these schools have been specifically trained to work with at-risk youth with unique characteristics. Therefore, in-depth analysis is needed to understand how the existing literature addresses this issue and how these teachers can be helped to address the challenges they face.

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter is a systematic analysis of a literature review that will present the definitions from the literature on the concept of "youth at risk in Israel" and will describe the unique characteristics of this population. In addition, this section will detail the central problem the article deals with, the emotional and pedagogical challenges faced by teachers working with at-risk youth in Israel.

### 2.1. Existing definitions on youth at-risk in Israel

From the beginning of the 1980s in Israel, the use of educational science in the term of youth at risk has increased. At the end of the 1990s, the Ministry of Social Affairs defined the population at risk according to the risk factors: intra-personal (illness, etc.); Interpersonal (culture, etc.) and external (war, etc.). Risk factors are not permanent but may change and may be unexpected (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, 1998). Based on this definition, Lahav (2000) divided the population of at-risk youth in three groups: a. Children and adolescents who are in direct and immediate danger (victims of abuse and neglect, deviant behaviors), b. Children and adolescents living in an environment that poses an indirect danger (violence between parents, deviant behaviors of parents and poverty), c. Children and adolescents in circumstances that could put them at risk (parental divorce, single parent, family unemployment, new immigrants). The concept of "at-risk youth" was based on risk components (wandering, deviant behaviors, etc.) of youth and its affiliation with a therapeutic framework, youth promotion (Romi & Shmida, 2007).

The lack of a uniform definition for this population led to non continuous treatment of at risk children so therefore in 2004, a public committee was established to investigate the condition of children and adolescents at risk, led by Professor Hillel Schmidt. The committee was based on 20 articles of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and definitions accepted in the professional literature and policy makers in Israel. In 2006, the Commission defined the concept of

"Children and Youth at Risk": "Children and youth in distress live in situations that endanger them through their family and environment, and as a result their ability to exercise their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been impaired" in these areas: physical existence, health and development; Family affiliation; Learning and acquiring skills; Emotional benefit and emotional health; Belonging and social participation; Protection against others and their own dangerous behaviors. In addition, the report of the Schmidt Committee (2006) noted situations of increased risk: financial difficulties, family crisis situations (such as parent death or parental separation), immigration, minority affiliation, disability, learning disability, transition between frameworks, risk situations. This definition is the basis for the activities of the National Youth Advancement Program in Israel.

## **2.2. At-risk youth characteristics in Israel**

Israel is considered an immigrant-absorbing society and a distinctly multicultural immigrant company (Calderon, 2000) and has a large number of children and young people. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2015 there were 2,768,000 children in Israel (birth to age 17), which is about 33% of the total population. In January 2016, 367,000 children and youth (up to age 17) were enrolled in social services departments (The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, 2017). Based on the definition proposed by the Schmidt Commission (2006) mentioned in the previous chapter, Etzion (2010), it classifies the population according to various characteristics:

### **2.2.1. A characteristic of dropout from an educational setting**

At-risk youth find it difficult to adjust to school, their academic achievement and their behavior is poor, as a result, they leave the educational system, this behavior is called visible dropout. On the other hand, there are students who are enrolled in the educational setting but are often absent due to feelings of alienation, social isolation or behavioural problems and lack of adjustment. This behavior is called hidden dropout. Not being present in normative educational settings intended for their peers puts them at risk. In Israel there is a compulsory education law and even the studies at a recognized educational institution is free. Despite this, there is a substantial case of dropout from the education system, which gave rise to sending delegates to check on them regularly.

### **2.2.2. Socio-demographic characteristics**

a. Gender. There is a large gap between the number of male youths at risk compared to the smaller number of females at risk. b. Ethnic-cultural origin. The number of youth who drop out of the eastern states is greater than the dropout youth from Ashkenazi, as well as the proportion of new immigrants who are at higher risk than the proportion of indigenous people who are at risk. c. Parental education. The lower the level of parental education, the higher the risk of their children. d. Marital status. affiliation of the youth to a family whose parents are divorced, single parent, multi-child family, abnormal parenting relationship, deviant parenting behaviors. e. Socioeconomic status. The lower the socioeconomic status, the higher the risk of being at risk. f. Place of residence. The youth's place of residence is important for examining his behavior. In addition, residence affects the development of the youth. Any familys' problem statistically increases the chance of the youth being detached.

### **2.2.3. Personal characteristics**

a. Personal, Social, Behavioral and Emotional Adaptation. The individual's personal adjustment meets his or her personal and psychological needs. The individual adapts to the conditions of the environment and even welcomes the adaptation. Successful personal adaptation of the individual contributes to self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of independence and coping with difficulties. Lack of adjustment in one of these areas causes deviant behaviors. b. Deviant behaviors. Involvement in criminal activity, drug consumption, criminal cases. c. Mental well-being. the degree of happiness and satisfaction the individual feels. In cases where teens face mental difficulties such as anxiety and depression, their mental well-being is impaired. d. Self-esteem. The individual examines how satisfied he is with his ability, skills, behavior and emotions. High self-esteem contributes to dealing with failure and crisis situations. e. Attachment. At-risk youth do not experience a normal attachment relationship in childhood which is the basis for security and trust, as a result of this population's attachments being abnormal. Abnormal attachment at childhood can lead to the development of psychopathologies and personality disorders.

### **2.2.4. Environmental Characteristics**

a. Family connections. Family crisis situations (illness, death, imprisonment, divorce, etc.) and family characteristics (single parent, divorced parents, unemployment, etc.) increase the chances that the adolescent will be at risk. b. Social relationships. Unacceptable social connections between them and their education cause dropout from the educational system and deviant behaviours. c. The school experience. The educational framework plays a significant role in the youth's future. Youths drop out because of the next set of adjustment difficulties, learning difficulties, low achievement.

At-risk youth have unique characteristics that require broad support from educators and social services to reduce their difficulties, drop out of school and even reduce the amount of youth at risk in Israel.

## **2.3. The challenges of teachers working with at-risk youth.**

The teaching profession involves a high level of emotional work (Kelchtermans, 2001; Naring, Briet, & Brouwer, 2007). In the past, the teaching profession was mainly addressed from a rational, emotionless perspective. Today it is clear that emotion is a significant component of the teaching work (Oplatka, 2011). Teaching in special education involves emotional engagement that invites teacher's emotional experiences significant, arising from the constant interaction with children with problems and suffering from suffering and pain. This interaction requires a high level of dedication and emotional involvement of teachers who deal with students' feelings, as well as responding to the emotional needs of the children in their care. These pose many challenges for teaching staff (Mendelsohn & Yehezkel, 2016).

### **2.3.1. Emotional challenges**

a. Positive and Negative Feelings. The study of emotion teaching has identified many pleasant feelings that teachers experience in their work such as joy, happiness, love, compassion and excitement (Samier & Schmidt, 2009; Zembylas, 2004). On the other hand, teachers also experience less pleasant feelings such as guilt, shame, jealousy, frustration, disappointment, disillusionment, anxiety, anger, fear, embarrassment, frustration, vulnerability and sadness (Hargreaves, 2000; Kelchtermans, 2011; Nias, 1999; Ginat, 2011). b. Stress and Burnout. Freudenberg (1974) first introduced the term burnout and defined it as

a state of fatigue and of emptying physical and mental forces, a state of wear and tear. Etzion (1983), also, defined the concept of burnout as an ongoing process of depleting the employee's mental powers. Others, for example, Maslach and Jackson (1981), continued to develop the concept and distinguished three components of burnout: mental exhaustion, failure to fulfil, and the process of depersonalization. The teaching work is dealing with the teacher's personal feelings and the student's feelings, in addition to his cognitive and pedagogical interest in the content being studied. Many studies show that the teaching staff in the special education environment are faced with a higher level of burnout than the teaching staff in regular education (Brunsting, Sreckovic, & Lane, 2014; Lee, Patterson, Vega, 2011; Tzur, 2001). The teaching profession involves a lot of emotional work, so the teacher's emotional exhaustion is high. (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). c. "Compassion Fatigue". Compassion is an emotion of concern, identification and a desire to help others in pain and suffering. "Compassion fatigue" expresses a set of symptoms experienced when the facilitator is overly emotionally involved in the concept of "compassion fatigue" (Figley, 2002). The concept of "compassion fatigue," is also called empathy, countertransference, or distress. For the first time, Joinson (1992) conceptualized the burnout phenomenon after examining nurses in emergency medicine departments. Joinson (1992) noticed that compassion for the other person's grief and trying to soothe his pains could impair the mentor's ability to be empathetic and forever. Many describe the causes of "Compassion fatigue" as prolonged exposure to traumatic memories, pain and suffering of the care giver (Figley, 2002; Salston & Figley, 2003; Razar, 2009). "Compassion Fatigue" may develop among educators due to the reverberation of the emotional power experienced by the student. Long-term exposure to students' grief, events and compassion and mental resources may create stress and emotional distress among educators themselves (Newell & MacNeil, 2010). The expressions of "Compassionate Fatigue" are commonly divided into emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural expressions. One of the main phrases includes indifference to the needs of the student and a sense of disconnection and distancing. Feelings of anxiety, helplessness, sadness, depression and fear can also arise in the helpers. Physical manifestations include many, such complaints: headache, muscle pain, abdominal pain, weakness and fatigue. Expression of nervous behavior rules, distancing from others, decline in functioning, outbursts, seclusion, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, sleep disorders and social isolation. Cognitive expressions include lack of concentration, annoying thoughts and more (Gray, 2008; Mendelsohn & Yehezkel, 2016). d. Convergence and avoidance of action. Working with at-risk youth gives rise to many emotions that may lead to internal conflict and stress and cause educators to wish to avoid work (Razar 2009). Teachers who teach students with low socioeconomic backgrounds and low academic achievement often leave the educational framework to the point of dropping out of the system (Maagan, 2017). Dropout is associated with internal feelings of distress in the face of job demands and workload, which leads to functional difficulties (Arbiv-Elyashiv & Zimmerman, 2015).

### **2.5.2. Professional challenges**

a. Systemic phenomenon. Systemic phenomenon. Razar, Warshavsky, and Bar Sadeh (2011) found many professional difficulties facing teachers working with at-risk populations and claiming that they tend to perpetuate their failure in three processes: 1. helplessness. This pattern is characterized by the teacher's guilt and shame for the lack of success and ability to cope with difficulties. 2. Wrong identity. Teachers are

shattering their professional identity, as working with a weak population is considered to be inferior and worthless. 3. "Blame." The teacher's fault is caused by his lack of system success. As a result, blamed for his reaction to the system, he does not learn from his unsuccessful experiences and does not benefit from them. This language encourages unprofessional behavior and adversely affects staff morale and sense of efficiency. b. Professional prestige. Teachers working with at-risk youth are considered marginal in the system and as a result do not enjoy professional prestige (Razar, 2009). c. Vocational training. Teachers working with at-risk youth do not receive adequate vocational training (Cohen-Navot, Ellenbogen-Perkovitz, & Reinfeld, 2001). d. Teaching mismatched to student level. At-risk youth teachers are interested in intellectual challenge and a sense of appreciation. Based on this, they teach according to the goals and professional perceptions of schools working with a strong and established population, but fail because of a lack of professional coordination between the needs of the population and their goals (Razar, 2009).

In conclusion, continuous exposure to emotional and professional difficulties, without the support of professionals, causes physical, emotional difficulties and the perception of professional identity. This phenomenon is called the "exclusion cycle in education", where there is a mutual influence between the distress of the student population and the distress of the professional staff which should help it get out of the cycle of failure (Razar 2009).

### **3. Research Method**

A systematic analysis of a literature review.

### **4. Conclusion**

The professional and scientific preoccupation with educational work to promote at-risk youth, or educational-therapeutic work, is new and not yet known in developmental processes in Israel. In spite of its development, the area is still lacking. Most of the teachers who work with the population at risk, have not received sufficient training to work with them (Cohen-Navot et al., 2001). Due to the difficulty in defining the relevant and binding therapeutic content of training for educational-care workers. This difficulty is due to the lack of general agreement on the professional profile of youth promotion employees, as well as a game that in each organization you define one another (Gropper & Romi, 2015). The diversity of the needs of the youth requires a different style of answering, combining areas and types of specializations. According to Razar (2009), this continuous exposure, without support, creates difficulties for professionals in the physical, emotional system and the perception of professional identity. The emotions of the educational staff working with the at risk population are the most important tool for working effectively with them. In light of this, it is important for the educators to receive proper training and support. Peer support is a resource that empowers the teacher at work to help him overcome many difficulties at work and even promotes staying in the profession (Certo & Fox, 2002). Lack of peer support may elicit feelings of frustration and stress, and strengthen the tendency to leave the profession, especially among special education teachers, due to the intense exposure to difficult and complex cases (Billingsley, 2004). The main purpose of the escort and support process for teachers at risk and exclusion is to enable the educational staff to develop effective work approaches that will first and foremost deviate themselves from a state of distress

and threat, and on the other hand develop a high sense of professional competence and, on the other, relevant professional skills. It should be noted that teacher attitudes and professionalism are of central importance in creating a chance for student success in exclusion (Carrington, 1999). The success of modern students depends on the abilities of teachers to a greater extent than the success of mainstream students. Expanding the teaching concept and changing the functioning of educators bring proven results: improving academic achievement, changing regular visitation at school, reducing violence and vandalism within and outside the school, significantly improving students' self-image and sense of success in the future (Cohen-Navot & Lavanda, 2003).

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