

Volunteer Psychologist Network

A participatory evaluation | Hayat Sende, Turkey

About Hayat Sende

Hayat Sende Youth Academy Association, founded in 2007 by young adults who grew up under state protection and based in Ankara, Turkey aims to help children and young people transition from state care to independent living. The organisation advocates for equality of opportunity and provides tools and support for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to thrive without discrimination, challenging the common “mercy” approach in Turkish society (whereby children and youth under state care are protected out of pity, rather than from a rights-based perspective). Hayat Sende advocates for vulnerable groups like girls and young women, focusing on advocacy, awareness-building, and targeted programming to empower them, address their needs, and provide opportunities for success after leaving state care.

Project evaluated: Volunteer Psychologist Network

In 2021 Hayat Sende Association launched a Volunteer Psychologist Network which offers free psychological support to young adults with a background in state care, with the aim of equipping them with emotional resilience, self-confidence, and coping skills. Volunteer clinical psychologists and one part-time psychologist help young adults to navigate the emotional, social, and psychological challenges they face. The Network currently offers individuals between 25 to 30 support sessions, having increased from an initial 10 in 2021. Between 2021 and 2024, 66 young adults, primarily female university students, have benefited from the programme.

The project also provides regular supervision for psychologists, which enhances service quality and professional development.

Overall plan for the evaluation

By evaluating its Volunteer Psychologist Network, Hayat Sende aimed to assess the programme’s effectiveness and impact, identify areas for improvement, and gather feedback from psychologists and beneficiaries. The evaluation process was participatory, meaning that the stakeholders involved in the project - psychologists, supervisors, and beneficiaries - actively contributed to its assessment.



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A comprehensive evaluation plan was developed to capture the experiences and insights of all key participants. This involved interviews with psychologists, young adults, and supervisors to gather insights into the effectiveness of the services. These interviews allowed psychologists to share their experiences, challenges, and observations about the programme's impact on themselves and their beneficiaries. Supervisors also provided feedback on the programme's service to the clients.

The project period from 2023 to 2024 was evaluated, using qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The information gathered was analysed thematically, allowing for the identification of key trends, challenges, and areas of success.

Tools selected

The participatory evaluation was built on a set of tailored tools designed to capture detailed feedback from both psychologists and beneficiaries:

- **Structured interviews:** Customised questionnaires were created for each participant group. The psychologists' interviews focused on professional development, therapeutic approaches, challenges faced, and suggestions for improvement. The beneficiaries' interviews centred on their experiences with the service, its impact on their mental health, and their tips for enhancing the programme.
- **Supervision reports:** Psychologists and supervisors provided feedback during supervision meetings, which were used to assess how well these sessions contributed to the quality of the service offered. The reports also highlighted challenges faced by psychologists and identified areas where further training or support might be needed.
- **Thematic analysis:** The interview data were analysed thematically to identify response patterns and trends. This process helped uncover common issues, such as the need for longer sessions, and areas where the programme was particularly effective, such as around improving clients' coping skills and emotional regulation.

These tools allowed for an in-depth, participatory understanding of the programme's strengths and areas for development, with direct input from both service providers and recipients.

Evaluation outcomes

Psychologists' perspectives

Professional development: Psychologists reported significant professional growth resulting from their involvement in the Volunteer Psychologist Network. They valued the opportunity to work with a vulnerable population



they would not typically encounter in their private practice. Many psychologists highlighted the importance of the supervisory support they received, which allowed them to refine their therapeutic techniques and enhance their confidence in managing complex cases.

The therapeutic approaches used helped beneficiaries address negative thinking patterns and improve their emotional regulation and coping strategies. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) was the most commonly used therapeutic approach, followed by other methods such as Gestalt and Schema Therapy.

Challenges faced: Psychologists faced several challenges, such as establishing rapport with clients, particularly in online sessions, and ensuring that clients remained committed to the therapeutic process, given the free nature of the service. Some psychologists suggested introducing a small symbolic fee to improve client engagement.

Beneficiaries' perspectives

Improvement in mental health: Young beneficiaries reported significant improvements in anxiety levels, self-esteem, and coping mechanisms. Many stated that the support helped them navigate emotional difficulties and gave them a sense of belonging and connection. One participant described the change as moving from “ten to one” to “ten to ten” regarding emotional stability.

Service accessibility: While beneficiaries appreciated the free access to therapy, some expressed concerns about the limited number of sessions, suggesting that more extended sessions would have further improved their outcomes. Additionally, some beneficiaries preferred face-to-face sessions over online therapy, which they found less effective due to logistical challenges like finding private spaces for remote sessions.

Satisfaction with the service: Despite some challenges, all participants expressed satisfaction with the service and willingness to recommend it to others. They also emphasised the positive impact of receiving psychological support at an early age, which they felt was a rare opportunity for people in their situation.

“Before, I was more distant from psychological support, I didn’t think it could be very effective. It is normal for people to receive support in certain periods, my prejudice was broken. I did not have the opportunity to receive social psychological support on my own, Hayat Sende helped me a lot and made me very happy.”
- project participant



Lessons learnt

Supervision is crucial for professional development: Regular supervision of psychologists plays a critical role in ensuring the quality of the service provided. Supervisors help psychologists navigate the challenges they encounter and provide valuable insights into complex cases.

Service flexibility is key: Flexibility in the therapeutic approaches used and the mode of delivery (online versus in-person) is essential for reaching a broad audience and meeting individual needs.

Increase session availability: Beneficiaries' feedback highlighted the need for longer and more frequent sessions to address deeper issues and provide sustained support.

There is a need for increased resources: Psychologists expressed a need for more resources and training specifically tailored to working with youth with a background of state protection. This includes more written materials and case studies that can help psychologists better understand the unique challenges facing this population.

“At first I was prejudiced against seeking psychological support, but the association helped me take a step in this direction. My psychologist told me that she wanted to be a door in difficult situations. I want to continue seeing the same psychologist from time to time.” - Project participant

Conclusion

The Volunteer Psychologist Network has proven to be an essential resource for young people who have grown up under state protection, providing them with much-needed psychological support. Both psychologists and beneficiaries reported positive outcomes from the programme, including professional development for psychologists and improved mental health for beneficiaries. While the programme has achieved notable success, including improved mental health outcomes and professional growth for psychologists, it can be strengthened by expanding its network, increasing session availability, and providing additional resources and training. By incorporating stakeholder feedback, the programme can enhance its impact and empower young people more effectively.

CONTACT DETAILS

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