

# The FYF *Harikara* Model

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**Organization:** Free Yezidi Foundation

**Impact Statement:** We believe an effective and sustainable way to support the Yezidi community is through tiered trauma treatment. Our system relies on our team of *Harikara*, or helpers. The *Harikara* are FYF's cadre of Yezidi women who provide basic information and coping skills to IDPs, with a referral pathway to our expert psychologists for difficult cases. *Harikara* are trained in psychological first aid (PFA) and stabilization techniques, using the IASC stepped model. They serve a vital role in supporting those in acute distress or suffering from prolonged effects of trauma and displacement.

**Problem Statement/Background:** The Yezidi population of Sinjar, Iraq, was attacked by ISIS in a genocidal campaign in August of 2014. The genocide has left most survivors homeless, with no income, and severely traumatized. Thousands of men were killed, while women and girls were kidnapped and raped as sex slaves. For many survivors, these catastrophic events lasted for months or years. FYF is among few organizations led by and operating for Yezidis. Yezidis suffered a deliberate attempt by ISIS to exterminate our people specifically because of our religion. We view trauma recovery as the single most pressing need for individual Yezidi survivors and for the severely damaged community as a whole. FYF is sensitive to the suffering of survivors and the Yezidi cultural setting. Implementation has been carefully tailored with this in mind.

**Intervention:** The *Harikara* model is the Free Yezidi Foundation's innovative approach to improving mental health literacy and care in the Yezidi community. From 2017, we have been training Yezidi women to join the team. Our *Harikara* are trained in PFA, PFA for Children, Trauma Counselling, and Trauma Stabilization, provided in-house by our international psychologists. *Harikara* field visits consist of two steps. The first step is a one-off visit where our *Harikara* provide psychoeducation about trauma, teach the tent residents self-help techniques, and start a conversation about mental health with them.



This conversation not only aims to combat stigma by normalizing common mental health difficulties people are expected to experience after a communal traumatic experience such as genocide, but also helps them identify people who need further MHPSS support. The second step is to provide these people with the support they require by first discussing the cases with their supervisors, who are trained psychologists, to make an intervention plan and follow with a number of visits to implement it. Cases requiring specialized care are referred to our psychologists. The *Harikara* are therefore a sort of MHPSS outreach 'brigade', sharing information and coping skills directly with thousands of traumatized community members and families. This year has been challenging due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We have adapted our work to pandemic conditions, not only taking precautions to protect our beneficiaries and *Harikara*, but also using our tent visits as an opportunity to provide accurate information on COVID-19 prevention.

**Results:** In 2019 alone, we reached nearly 4000 beneficiaries with our psychoeducation visits. In 2020, we employed and retrained 31 *Harikara* in two IDP camps with a Traumatic Stress Relief (TSR) training package which particularly suited our model, as it aimed to train frontline, non-therapist personnel to work with highly traumatized populations. Despite the pandemic, our *Harikara* have still managed to reach 1500 IDPs with MHPSS visits in 2020.

**Photo Credit:** Free Yezidi Foundation (FYF)

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