



FONDATION  
**IMPACT HOPE**

## **Capacity building for trauma therapists and counsellors in Northern Iraq**

### **Background**

War and violence cause not only physical but also mental damage to people, sometimes leading to lasting psychological trauma. Trauma is often associated with co-morbidity, such as depression or drug addiction, and affects social relationships. Not only individuals, but entire communities and societies can be traumatized. This can result in increased domestic violence or tendencies towards radicalization. These consequences of trauma are often not recognised as such. People are stigmatised, called crazy. The only solutions are often medicines or religious healers. There is a great shortage of clinical psychologists, psychotherapists and trauma therapists in Iraq. The public health system is unable to meet the increasing needs and private practice remains unaffordable for most people. NGOs and international aid projects alone cannot absorb these deficits in the long term. In order to establish a network of trauma therapy specialists within local structures, it is necessary to invest in intensive training that is not otherwise available in the country.

### **Brief summary of the project**

The project consists of capacity building for therapists in Northern Iraq and Syria.

Twenty-five local professionals with training in psychology will be trained to provide appropriate therapeutic support to traumatized people and their families and facilitate their reintegration into a non-violent society. Another six participants, who have already undergone previous training in trauma therapy, will accompany the new training group as co-trainers/facilitators and will thus acquire in-depth knowledge and skills in the field.

## **Specific objective and expected results**

The specific objective of the project is to improve the mental health of traumatised people in Iraq and Syria. To reach this objective, a number of results will be achieved:

- By 2021, local professionals will have acquired in-depth knowledge in psycho trauma.
- Trained professionals will have applied their knowledge and techniques after completing their training.
- The well-being and symptoms of clients will have improved during treatment by trained professionals.
- A network of trauma specialists will be operational in Iraq.

## **Activities**

The training programme consists of seven five-day modules that take place over two years in different cities in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, where the security situation is stable. The first module is scheduled for early 2020. Each module has two trainers. The programme has been developed according to the standards of the German Society for Psycho-Traumatic Therapy (DeGPT). Participants receive a certificate at the end of the training. Between modules, they carry out exercises in peer groups and are required to repeat and discuss what they have learned.

Two international refresher courses on the topic of trauma will also be organised. These advanced seminars will be held for participants from different countries, including six from the Iraqi programme. They will broaden their knowledge, take ownership of the methods and thus improve the quality of their therapeutic work. The result will be an intercultural network of trauma professionals, in which participants will learn from each other and stimulate each other in their work.

## **Contribution of the project to a real change**

In 2015, 20 Iraqi professionals completed the first training cycle and were certified as trauma therapists and counsellors. In 2018, 25 Iraqi therapists completed the second cycle of training and were certified as trauma therapists and counsellors, and five completed further training as co-facilitators. The graduates are working as trauma therapists and counsellors in Dohuk, Erbil, Nineveh, Kirkuk, Halabja and Sulaymaniyah provinces. This approach is very innovative in the region and will bring about significant changes in the diagnosis and treatment of trauma, in respect for traumatized people and in the improvement of mental health in general.

## **Location of the project**

Several regions of Iraq and Kurdistan.

## **Local partner**

The Jiyān Foundation for Human Rights is dedicated to helping survivors of serious human rights violations in Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan and Syria. It targets victims of torture, genocide, political persecution, domestic gender-based violence and terrorist attacks. The Jiyān Foundation offers free medical, psychotherapeutic, legal and social support to men, women and children in eleven locations. The local therapeutic team consists of approximately 140 doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, trauma therapists and physiotherapists who participate in regular training courses. As rehabilitation must be understood holistically, the Foundation is also engaged in work on human rights in schools, on raising awareness of the consequences of violence and on empowering disadvantaged groups.

## **Direct and indirect beneficiaries**

In the context of the current humanitarian emergency in Iraq and Syria, the project contributes to the mental health sector within the framework of International Cooperation. The project aims to build sustainable capacity in the region, especially in specialised services. It works closely with local hospitals, other NGOs and civil society actors and international aid organisations, as well as with UN structures in Iraq.

The 31 trainees working at the Jiyān Foundation will treat around 1,500 patients per year in the major cities of the region, as well as in remote rural areas, refugee camps, prisons, women's shelters and emergency areas such as Mosul and northern Syria. The families and relatives of the patients will obviously be significantly impacted by the project.

## **Sustainability of the project**

Six graduates already certified will participate in the new group as co-trainers/facilitators and gain additional knowledge. They will be able to generate a multiplier effect in the sense of a train-the-trainer approach.

Only local specialists will be trained in this project. The knowledge will therefore be anchored in the long term. The project is thus an example, whereas the trend among international health organisations is rather short-term.

The Jiyān Foundation organises a programme of seminars for external professionals who are in regular contact with traumatised people (e.g. social workers, teachers, police officers, prison guards). Graduates of the therapy training

will conduct these seminars and inform them about symptoms and how to deal with trauma. State structures will therefore be directly impacted.

Adequate treatment by trained professionals can be a way out of the spiral of violence. Particularly traumatised men and boys often become abusers. Women, in turn, can be encouraged through therapy to find a way out of their role as victims. Work on trauma is not only a matter of individual help, but also an important contribution to the reconstruction of Iraqi and Syrian societies.

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

The Jiyān Foundation, in cooperation with Wings of Hope Germany, will provide regular supervision and monitoring of the trainees during and after the project.

Both will have a great deal of experience and will be able to measure the professional development of the trainees as well as the general improvement of mental health throughout their programme.