

TRAUMA SENSITIVE COUNSELING SERVICES IN SYRIA

JUNE 2025

IMPACT REPORT



Total Number by Gender Cinsiyete Göre Toplam Sayı		Total Number by Age Group aş Gruplarına Göre Toplam Sayı			Total Number by Disability Engellilik Durumuna Göre Toplam Sayı			
Males erkekler	Females kadınlar	0 - 5	6-12	13-17	Physic al Disabi lity	Other disabili ty	Intell ectual Disab ility	No Disabiliti es
350		0	151	199	9	-	1	-
	356	0	231	125	3	-	-	-

Children's Feedback on the Psychological Guidance Room

Focus Group

As part of this study, a focus group discussion was held with **children aged 10 to 13** to explore their perceptions of the guidance room. The aim was to understand how the space supports **feelings of safety, emotional expression, empowerment, and collaboration**.

The questions were structured around core principles of the Trauma-Informed Approach, specifically focusing on safety & trustworthiness, empowerment, and collaboration.

What We Asked



Do you feel safe in the guidance room? Why?



Have you ever felt better after coming to this room? How?



When you come to this room, do you feel comfortable sharing your feelings?



Have you learned anything in this room that helped you in your daily life? What did you learn?



How do you feel during group activities here? Do you want to participate?

What Children Said

“I feel comfortable and safe in the activity room.”

“I feel **safe** because we are inside the school.”

“I also learned not to bully others here.”

“I used to feel unhappy because I couldn't express myself in front of people, but when I came into the room, I met friends and, thanks to collaboration, I can now **express myself more comfortably**.”

“Our teacher taught us how to bond with each other.”

“Our teacher taught us how **to bond with each other**.”

“I used to prefer playing alone, but when I entered the room and saw my friends playing together, I became like them, and now I've started to prefer playing with other children outside as well.”

“I learned to show **respect** to everyone.”

“I enjoy participating in group activities because it boosts my **self-confidence**.”

“I really like the layout of the room, and the colors of the furniture are the best part.”

“The room is a bit small and dark. Also, sometimes it gets noisy when other students come in. And when I want to move my chair, I can't because the space is tight.”

Thematic Analysis of Children's Feedback

When the children's responses during the focus group session were analyzed, certain themes emerged. These themes are as follows:

Sense of Security

The majority of the children stated that they felt safe in the activity room.

Self-Expression

The children clearly stated that they were able to express themselves comfortably in the room.

Emotional Well-being and Relaxation

Children reported a positive change in their mood after coming to the room:

- "We were very happy when we first entered the room with my friends."
- "It's very noisy outside; I feel calmer and more relaxed here."
- "I used to struggle to express myself, but now I can speak more comfortably thanks to collaboration."

Room Layout and Aesthetic Features

The children are largely satisfied with the room's layout and appearance. Aesthetic features are important to them.

Group Activities and Social Skills Development

Children described group activities as enjoyable, confidence-building, and socially enriching.

Learning and Real-Life Benefits

The experiences gained in the activity room appear to carry over into daily life:

- "I learned not to bully others here."
- "I learned how to play together, and now I prefer playing with others outside too."
- "I learned to show respect to everyone."
- "I learned how to express my feelings and not hurt others when speaking."

Evaluation of the Guidance Room from the Children's Perspective

Participatory Visual Methods

As part of this activity, a child-centered, participatory method was implemented with **8 children aged between 6 and 9**. The aim was to provide children with the opportunity to express the places where they feel safe, happy, and comfortable through drawings, and to use their perspectives to evaluate the current guidance room.

The children drew pictures of the places **where they feel the safest**. Once the drawings were completed, we held brief discussions with each child to explore how closely the guidance room resembles their imagined safe space, how it makes them feel, and what they like or wish to see improved.

What Children Say

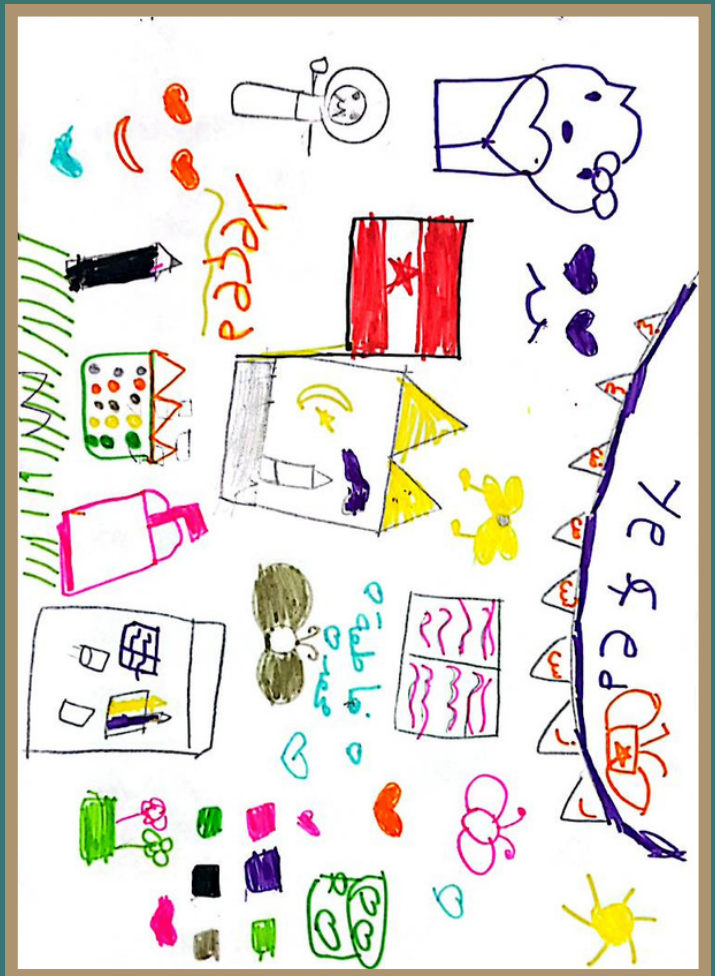
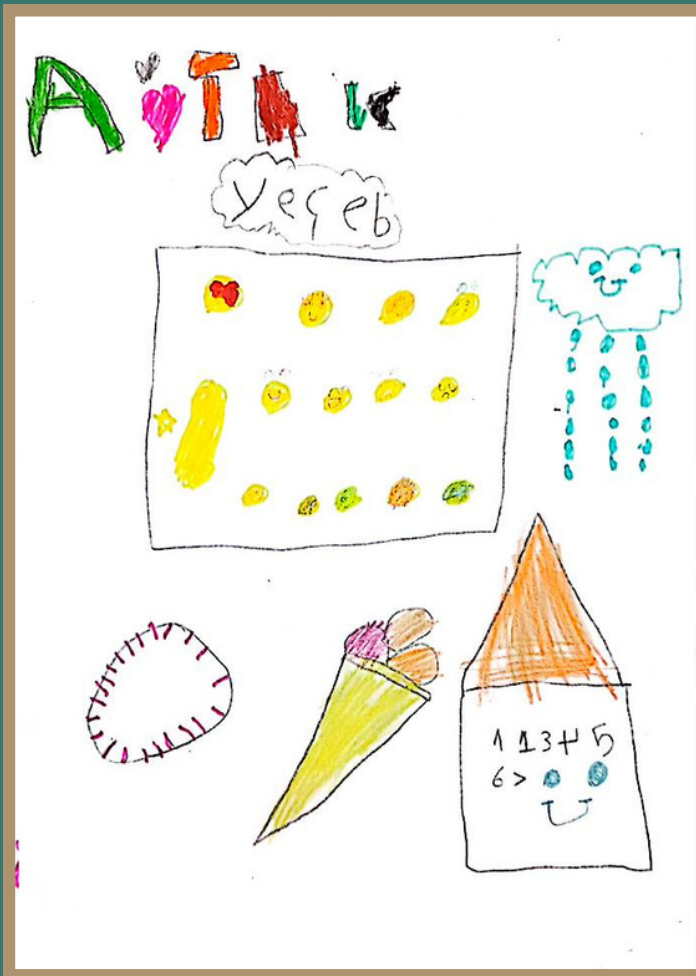
The children expressed that **they loved the guidance classroom and shared that they had developed a strong and positive relationship with their teacher**. They often depicted this classroom as their safe space in their drawings.



“*It feels like my second home.*”

“*I imagine this place as my own room.*”

“*I want to take this room with me when I go back to my village.*”



Evaluating Student Change

Teacher Interviews

In order to evaluate the changes observed in students, we conducted interviews with teachers at Rahmet School. The aim was to gain insight into the impact of the trauma-informed school environment and various intervention programs on students' emotional well-being, social behaviors, and overall conduct. We also sought to understand the perceived effects of school-based social activities on student development.

The areas of focus included:

- **Emotional State and Inner Well-being**
- **Changes in Social Behavior**
- **Behavioral Observations**
- **Impact of School-Based Interventions and Social Activities**

To explore these themes, we asked the following key questions:

➡ In your opinion, how has the trauma-informed school environment affected the overall emotional well-being of the children, particularly in terms of their ability to express emotions, manage anger, and reduce levels of anxiety, fear, or stress?

➡ Have you observed any changes in children's peer relationships, their participation in group activities or play, and their compliance with classroom rules?

➡ What have you observed regarding children's responses to the activity room and the psychological support provided, particularly in terms of positive changes among previously withdrawn or disruptive students, and were there any student experiences that particularly surprised or moved you?

➡ After participating in social projects, have you observed any changes in how students interact with one another (e.g., empathy, solidarity, respect), and do you believe such projects contribute to the educational process? Why or why not?

What Teachers Said

“Previously, the students used to fight, use inappropriate language, damage property, and ignore the teachers. But now, **they are much calmer**, which has been very positive for the teachers.”

“The children's behavior has changed significantly. They now paint together and **play in harmony**.”

“It has been very beneficial. The children look forward to the activity and eagerly await these two days. These sessions are a **source of motivation** for the students.”

“They are very happy in our counseling room and often say they love it when returning to class. They always want to go. After the activity, **they feel more motivated** and engage better in lessons.”

“Socially, the children have become stronger. They help and support each other, and **their communication skills have improved**.”

“They have **learned to show respect to one another** and are more respectful toward their teachers.”

“Constant **academic pressure can be challenging** for students. Engaging in activities and providing support has been very beneficial for them.”

“Even the children who used to be shy, scared, or unwilling to speak have overcome these challenges. They now want to participate in social activities. It has empowered them and helped them grow personally, **boosting their self-confidence**.”

“The children have become more eager and **willing to come to school**.”

Thematic Analysis of Teacher's Feedback

Several key themes emerged from the teacher interviews.

Improvement in Overall Emotional Well-Being and Motivation

- The activities clearly have a calming and reassuring effect on the children.
- The discomfort they experienced in the camp environment has, at least temporarily, diminished thanks to the activities, and the children have begun to view the school as a “safe space.”
- Students eagerly look forward to these activities and feel happier and more motivated afterward.

Decrease in Behavioral Problems

- It has been reported that the high levels of anger outbursts, disruptive behaviors, and resistance toward teachers observed before the intervention have significantly decreased.

The Importance of the Counseling Room

- The reassuring and regulatory effects of physical spaces (play/activity rooms) on children have been emphasized.

Changes in Attitudes Toward School and Teachers

- Thanks to the activities, the children's perceptions of school have changed, and their sense of belonging has increased.
- It has been reported that students exhibit more consistent and positive behaviors in both social and academic settings.

Coping with Separation Anxiety

- Due to constant displacement, loss, and a lack of security, the children have developed separation anxiety.
- Psychoeducational interventions on this topic have proven to be effective.

Improvement in Social Behavior and Relationships

- Children who became withdrawn due to trauma are now able to re-engage in social settings through structured activities.
- Children who used to be shy and act alone are now working together in groups and building social and emotional bonds.
- The activities have contributed to the children's personal development and boosted their self-confidence.

Improvement in Social Skills and Communication

- Social interaction among children has increased, communication skills have improved, and friendships have been positively affected.
- Students have learned to help and respect each other.

Evaluating the Impact of Trauma-informed Care Training for Educators

The Trauma-informed Care Training

The aim was to equip teachers and school staffs with the knowledge to

1. **recognize trauma**
2. **identify students showing traumatic signs**
3. **enabling appropriate responses and interventions.**



- This training session focused on understanding trauma, its types, and the symptoms exhibited by children affected by trauma.
- The session highlighted the **impacts of trauma** on children's emotional, social, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual development, as well as their learning processes.
- Emphasis was placed on improving the capacity of school staff to understand and address these effects, fostering a more supportive and **trauma-sensitive school environment**.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the training, pre-test and post-test assessments were conducted with the teachers who participated in the program.



We used the **trauma-informed care scale**. The scale consists of 21 items and 3 subscales: **Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice**. It is designed to assess the levels of knowledge, attitude, and practice regarding trauma-informed care among mental health professionals working with individuals who have a history of trauma.

Pre- and Post-Test Results

Trauma Informed Care Scale

Purpose



To measure the level of knowledge, attitude and practice related to trauma-informed care



Participant

67 teachers who attended the trauma-informed care training

Findings

The participants' pre-test mean score was 53.85, while the post-test mean score was 60.54. Based on these results, an average increase of 6.69 points was observed following the intervention.

This change reflects an approximate **12.42% improvement** relative to the pre-test mean. These findings suggest that the training had a positive impact on participants' understanding and capacity to respond effectively to trauma-related issues in educational settings.

Travma Bilgili Bakım Ölçeği					
Yönerge: Bu ölçek travma mağduru danışanlarla çalışan ruh sağlığı çalışanlarının travma bilgili bakımla ilgili bilgi, tutum ve uygulama düzeylerini ölçmektedir. Kesinlikle Katılmıyorum (0), Katılmıyorum (1), Kararsızım (2), Katılıyorum (3), Kesinlikle Katılıyorum (4) puan şeklindedir. Size en uygun seçeneği işaretleyiniz.					
	0	1	2	3	4
1. Travmaya maruz kalmak yaygındır.					
2. Travma fiziksel, duygusal ve zihinsel sağlığı etkiler.					
3. Madde kullanımı sorunları, geçmişteki travmatik deneyimlerin veya olumsuz çocukluk yaşantılarının göstergesi olabilir.					
4. Ruh sağlığı sorunları ile geçmiş travmatik deneyimler veya olumsuz çocukluk yaşantıları arasında bir bağlantı vardır.					
5. Güvensiz davranış, geçmiş travmatik deneyimlerin veya olumsuz çocukluk yaşantılarının göstergesi olabilir.					
6. Travma istemsiz bir şekilde tekrarlayabilir.					
7. İnsanlar kendi travmalarını toparlama ve iyileştirme konusunda uzmandırlar.					
8. Danışanlarımız ve aileleriyle etkin bir şekilde çalışmak için travma bilgili uygulama önemlidir.					
9. Travma bilgili uygulama hakkında kapsamlı bir anlayışa sahibim.					
10. Travma bilgili uygulama ilkelerine inanıyor ve bunları destekliyorum.					
11. Travma bilgili uygulama hakkında uzmanlığımı meslektaşlarımla paylaşıyor ve onlarla etkin bir şekilde işbirliği yapıyorum.					
12. Travma bilgili uygulama konusunda daha fazla eğitim almak istiyorum.					
13. Danışanlarla olan tüm etkileşimlerde şeffaflığı koruyorum					
14. Danışanlara seçenekler sunuyorum ve kararlarına saygı duyuyorum					
15. Danışanların ve meslektaşlarının kendi güçlü yanlarını fark etmelerine yardımcı oluyorum.					
16. Çalışmalarına başlamadan önce tüm danışanları bilgilendiririm.					
17. Her danışanla olan etkileşimim benzersizdir ve onların özel ihtiyaçlarına göre uyarlanmıştır					
18. Öz-bakım yapıyorum (kendi ihtiyaçlarım ve sağlığımı ilgilendiriyorum).					

Teacher Insights

Teacher Interviews

Following the trauma-informed care training, individual interviews were conducted with participating teachers to explore their perceptions of trauma, approaches to psychosocial support, and opinions on Islamic psychology practices.

To explore these themes, we asked the following key questions:



Perception Change Regarding Trauma

How has your awareness and knowledge of recognizing trauma symptoms in students changed after the training compared to before?



Perception Change Regarding Psychosocial Support

How has the project influenced your views on the impact of psychosocial support on children's behavior and learning processes?



Change in Classroom Approach and Behavior

How has your approach toward students' negative behaviors and your support strategies for traumatized children in the classroom changed after the training?



Islamic Psychology Approach

What are your observations on the role of the Islamic psychology approach and faith-based support in promoting students' overall well-being in the school environment?

Thematic Analysis of Teacher's Interviews

📌 Increased Awareness and Confidence in Recognizing and Responding to Trauma 📌

Before the training, participants had limited knowledge of trauma, mostly based on prior assumptions. Through the training, they gained a clearer understanding of the definition, types, symptoms, and effects of trauma. Many reported feeling more confident in identifying traumatized children and intervening appropriately. Misconceptions were corrected, and knowledge gaps were filled. Participants noted that they now better understand how to respond to trauma in the classroom and wished the training had been provided earlier to allow for practical application.

We can now identify a traumatized child and intervene in less complex cases. We also learned how to assess the level of trauma.

I had some knowledge, but now I understand what trauma really is and how to help children recover from it.

📌 Psychosocial Support as Key to Well-being and Learning 📌

Psychosocial support is essential not only for trauma but also for holistic child development.

Teachers reported increased emotional awareness among students, who began to express their feelings more openly and felt safe doing so. The creation of a secure and supportive environment helped students manage their emotions, make their own decisions, and better understand concepts such as friendship, cooperation, and responsibility. Teachers noted that **the support provided relief not only for students but also for themselves, as it helped manage classroom challenges** and behavioral issues. Many expressed that they previously lacked knowledge about how to respond to students' emotional needs. **The project was described as fundamentally transformative, contributing positively to students' mental health, social development, and academic engagement.** Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of early identification of trauma, as many families fail to recognize it.

Improved Student Behavior Through Structured Support

Following the implementation of the project, teachers observed significant positive changes in classroom behavior. Previously, **misbehavior and hyperactivity were common** among students. However, after the project, students became noticeably calmer and more focused. **The activity room played a key role in this transformation**, providing a space for students to release excess energy in a healthy and structured way. Teachers reported that students who used to express themselves through conflict and disruptive behavior began to engage more constructively. The project also gave students opportunities to explore their talents, which contributed to improved self-regulation and increased self-confidence. Overall, both students and teachers described the change as highly positive and impactful.



As a result, disciplinary referrals to school administration decreased.

Impact of School-Based Intervention Programs



The programs also helped uncover students' hidden talents and personal strengths.

The school-based intervention programs, including activities like the Ramadan exhibition, theater had a notable impact on students' social and emotional development. Through these programs, students discovered new hobbies and realized their potential to create and contribute. Teachers reported improvements in classroom engagement and academic performance as a result. **Social cohesion among students increased** significantly – **cooperation, peer support**, and empathy became more visible in daily interactions. One of the most transformative effects was the breakdown of emotional barriers between students and teachers, fostering a more trusting and open school environment. Dialogue among students became more constructive, and a collective sense of purpose emerged as they worked together toward shared goals. Overall, the interventions promoted stronger friendships, greater self-awareness, and a more inclusive, supportive school culture.

Culture-based Approach

Teachers expressed that integrating the culturally sensitive approach into the project was highly valuable and culturally appropriate. They emphasized that it aligned well with their daily lives, which are guided by **cultural principles, making the program more meaningful and relatable**. The inclusion of spiritual and faith-based elements not only supported the students' emotional development but also reinforced core values such as **respect, responsibility, and compassion**. Many suggested that the use of culturally sensitive approach should be further developed and expanded in future programs, highlighting its strong potential to support holistic well-being in culturally sensitive ways.



“This approach contributed positively to both learning and character development.”

Parent Evaluation

Evaluation Scale

To comprehensively assess the project, a five-question Likert-Type scale was sent to parents. Feedback was collected regarding changes in their children's emotional state, behavior, and school motivation, as well as the overall impact of the project. We asked following key questions:

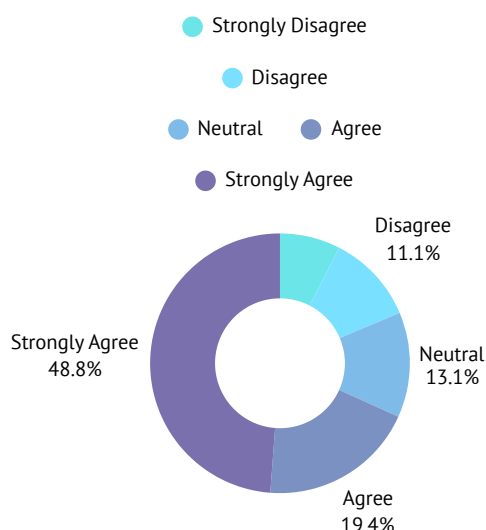
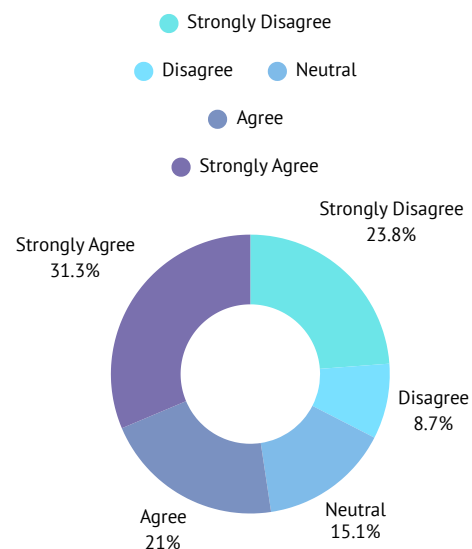
252 parents participated in our evaluation.



Questions

- **Compared to before the project, I have observed positive changes in my child's mood and behavior.**

According to feedback collected from parents, nearly **50% of parents** observed noticeable positive changes in their children's emotional state and behavior, suggesting a perceived beneficial impact of the project on their psychosocial development.



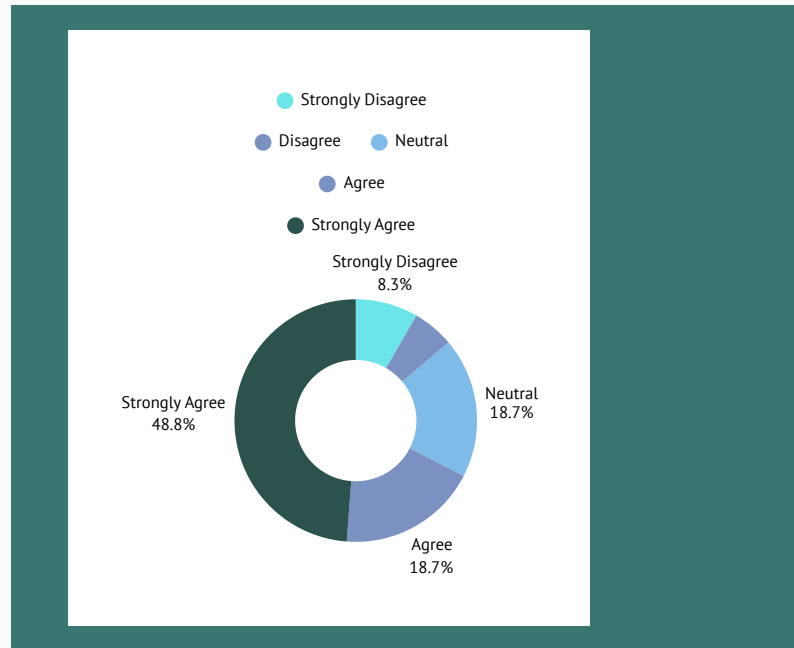
- **Psychosocial support increased my child's interest in and motivation for school.**

According to the survey results, **68% of parents** stated that the psychosocial support provided through the project contributed to enhancing their child's interest in school and improving their motivation to attend and participate.

- For children who have experienced trauma, academic support alone is not sufficient; psychosocial support is essential.

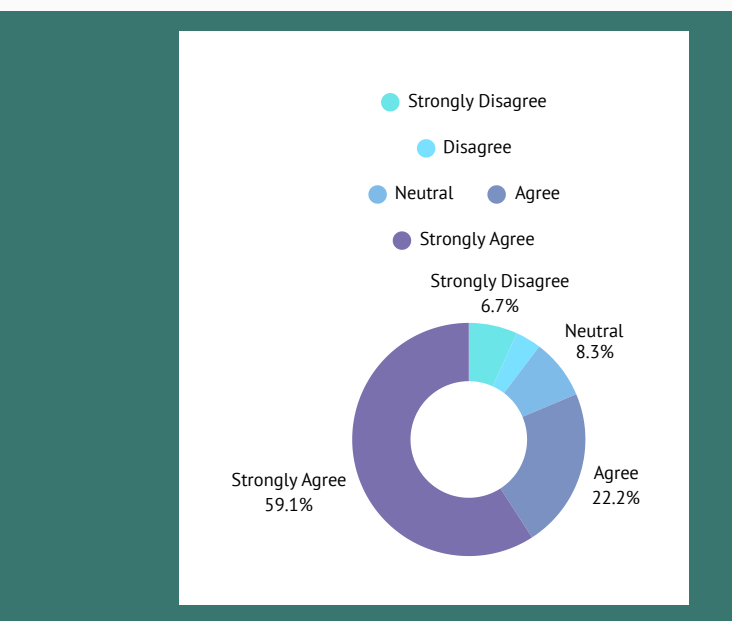
68% of parents agreed with the statement that academic support alone is not sufficient for children who have experienced trauma, and that psychosocial support is critically important.

There is a high level of demand and appreciation for psychosocial support services, which are perceived as vital for children's holistic recovery and development.



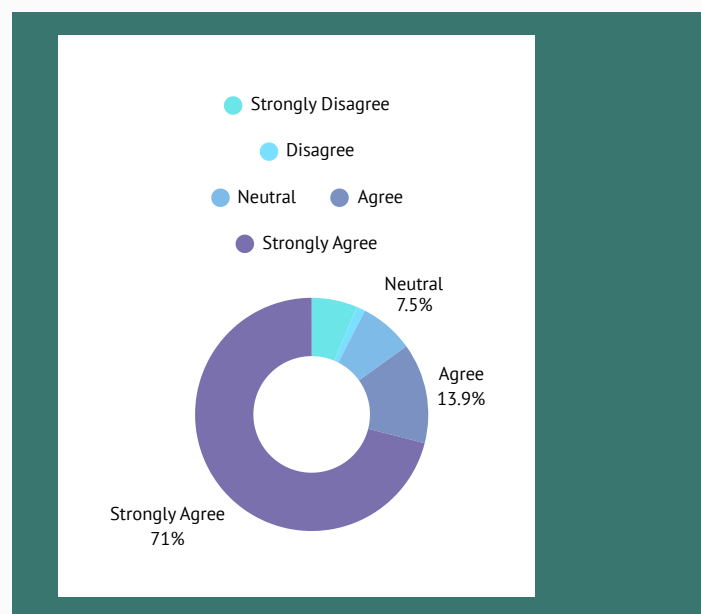
- The faith- and culture-based approach used in the project had a positive impact on my child.

According to the survey results, 81% of parents reported that the faith- and culture-based approach, grounded in Islamic psychology and implemented throughout the project, positively influenced their child's emotional well-being and overall development.



- "I believe it is very important to continue such supportive programs."

88% of parents agreed with the statement that they find it very important to continue such supportive interventions. Parents emphasized the need for sustained support that addresses not only academic needs but also emotional and spiritual well-being, especially in the context of trauma and displacement.



Teachers' Recommendations

"The number and duration of sessions should be increased"

Teachers suggested that the number and duration of sessions should be increased to allow for deeper engagement and more meaningful learning. Group sizes be reduced or session structures adjusted to ensure that all students can benefit equally from the program.



"Parks and gardens in the school yards will be beneficial for them."

The healing effects of play and contact with nature were emphasized, and it was recommended that children have access to movement and play areas.

"Every school needs a psychological counselor. Before Syria's liberation, they used to be available in city centers, but not in villages—now children really need them."

A strong recommendation was made for the system. It was emphasized that counseling specialists should be distributed to rural areas, highlighting their critical role in helping children cope with trauma.

Student Progress Stories



The examples of change shared by teachers clearly demonstrate noticeable improvements in the children's behavior, emotional well-being, and social interactions. Teachers have observed increased engagement, better communication skills, and more positive attitudes among the students. These reported changes provide strong evidence of the positive impact of the project's interventions on the children's overall development.

From Isolation to Connection

“At the beginning of the program, one student with multiple health issues was very withdrawn and struggled to connect with others. With consistent support from teachers, the student gradually opened up, became more outgoing, and began forming friendships. This positive change highlights the impact of a supportive and caring environment.

“A girl who used to sit alone and rarely spoke to anyone became withdrawn after her close friend left. However, through regular participation in our activities, she gradually began to re-engage. Over time, she started interacting more with others and showed signs of emotional improvement. This highlights the role of inclusive group activities in supporting children through social and emotional transitions.

“A girl who previously disliked school and was reluctant to attend activities began participating in our sessions. After joining, she consistently wanted to continue attending and showed a positive change in attitude. She became very respectful during lessons and more engaged overall, demonstrating the benefits of the program on her motivation and behavior.

Student Progress Stories



“ An 8th grade girl was initially aggressive, often shouting and provoking her classmates. In the second semester, she became noticeably calmer and began to understand how to behave appropriately in different situations. Her interactions with peers improved significantly.

“ A 7th grade girl was initially very withdrawn and highly stressed, despite being academically strong. She avoided participation even when she knew the answers.

Through the program, her stress decreased, and she began to engage more confidently. By the end, she showed improved self-confidence and reported less exam anxiety, marking a clear emotional and behavioral transformation

“ A 7th grade girl initially dominated class discussions, answering every question and not giving others a chance to speak.

Through the program, she learned the importance of taking turns, respecting her peers, and not shouting over others. By the end, she showed greater self-control and improved social awareness.

“ A 5th grade student, was initially disengaged and unmotivated. She often left class using excuses, such as going to the restroom, and rarely completed her assignments.

In the second semester, however, she began to take her studies more seriously. She started completing her homework and showed increased effort and responsibility toward her learning.

THANK YOU

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