

WG 3 (Psychological Health)

## Havat HaShomer - From the Therapist's Perspective

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Havat HaShomer is a unique training base in the IDF designed for soldiers from challenging backgrounds, including those from low socioeconomic status and those who struggle to adapt to a structured environment. Through a specialized training program that provides a supportive and encompassing atmosphere, these soldiers are prepared not only for military service but also for successful civilian life.

The IDF, as a people's army with mandatory service, must cater to the diverse population it recruits, ensuring equal opportunity and maximizing each soldier's potential contribution. The demands of the military framework can either lead to further failure (as it is not inherently a therapeutic or rehabilitative setting), or, through a successful combination of external boundaries and extensive support addressing emotional and physical needs, facilitate a change in established patterns and foster experiences of success.

The role of the mental health officer (social worker) encompasses diagnosis, treatment, and support for soldiers; referral to psychiatric care when necessary; and mediation with commanders. A dedicated pathway exists for soldiers who subsequently pursue further training, culminating in combat roles. Counseling and guidance are also provided to staff and commanders.

Upon completion of the program, soldiers are assigned to various IDF units based on their abilities and personal and family circumstances. The aim is to maximize their potential and open doors that would otherwise be inaccessible. Approximately 8% of these soldiers proceed to combat service. The majority complete meaningful full service, with a high percentage serving in special units and command positions.

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## Completion of Service in the Israel Defense Forces as a Volunteer with Autism vs Other Psychiatric Disorders: A Survival Analysis

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### **Background and Rationale:**

As part of the conscription process to the IDF, individuals undergo a thorough occupational evaluation, which may include advanced psychiatric testing. As a result, some individuals are excluded based on presentations of psychiatric diagnoses, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD). They can volunteer with the IDF in special capacities. This study aimed to examine completion rates and correlations of psychiatric volunteers during the first year of service. Individuals with ASD may meaningfully benefit from – and contribute to – military service.

### **Research Methodology:**

We used historical data maintained by the human resource database and medical records in the IDF to identify psychiatric volunteers between the years 2008 to 2017 (N=1,159). 76.9% were male and the mean age was 19.65. Overall, 32.3% (n=374) of psychiatric volunteers had a diagnosis of ASD and 67.7% (n=785) had other psychiatric diagnoses.

### **Findings:**

We used survival analysis. Overall, 59.5% (n=690) of the sample completed their first year of volunteering. Non-ASD compared with ASD psychiatric diagnoses (OR = 2.057, p < .001) was at greater risk to dropout in the first year.

### **Conclusions:**

Those diagnosed with ASD are more likely than individuals with other psychiatric disorders to stay in the military as part of volunteer service. Placing soldiers with ASD in an exclusive, way and in accordance with their abilities may contribute to their successful integration.