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Hellenic Foundation for  
Research & Innovation

Description of the research project  
**“Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking and  
separated children living in shelters”**

**1st Call for H.F.R.I. Research Projects to Support Faculty  
Members & Researchers and Procure High-Value  
Research Equipment**



**Title of the research project:**  
“Supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-seeking  
and Separated children living in shelters”

**Principal Investigator:** Danai Papadatou, *Professor of Clinical Psychology*

**Reader-friendly title:** U-ASC-4-PSYCH

**Scientific Area:** Social Sciences

**Institution and Country:** National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

**Host Institution:** National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

**Collaborating Institution(s):** (1) International Hellenic University and  
(2) “Merimna” – Society for the Care of Children and Families Facing Illness and Death

**Budget:** 104.199 €

**Duration:** 30 months

**Project webpage:** [www.uasc4psych.eu](http://www.uasc4psych.eu)

## Research Project Synopsis

The mental health of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking and Separated Children (UASC) living in Greece, seems to be seriously compromised as a result of the prolonged uncertainty with regards to their legal status and future given that the overwhelming majority perceive Greece as a 'transit' country. It remains unknown how **UASC with psychosocial difficulties or mental health problems** (e.g. self-harming behaviors, depression, panic attacks, psychotic episodes, violent behaviors, substance abuse) **are supported by an over-stretched mental health system without specialized knowledge in addressing the needs of refugee children belonging to other cultures.**

### Research goal

Based on a mixed methodology design, project's main goal is to provide an in depth exploration of psychosocial support and mental health services provided to unaccompanied minors who live in long-term facilities in Greece, specifically in shelters and Supported Independent Living Apartments (SILs).

# Research Project Synopsis

*(continued)*

## Research objectives

- 1) **To map the existing psychosocial services and mental health services for unaccompanied minors who live in long-term facilities** (Shelters & Supported Independent Living Apartments)
- 2) **To explore all stakeholders' perceptions about UASC's psychosocial needs including program designers, program coordinators, and field workers in comparison to how minors perceive their own needs**
- 3) **To generate an explanatory model which describes the factors and processes facilitating or hindering service design, delivery, and evaluation of psychosocial support and mental health services for UASC**
- 4) **To devise guidelines for:**
  - (i) **the development and implementation of psychosocial services for UASC living in long-term facilities,**
  - (ii) **the evaluation of these services, and**
  - (iii) **the support of field workers by their organization.**

## Project originality

The U-ASC-4-PSYCH research project is innovative in the following ways:

- 1. It is the first panhellenic in-depth study that explores the psychosocial needs of UASC by adopting a holistic approach, which compares the perceptions of four distinct groups: program designers, field workers in UASC shelters and SILs, community mental health professionals, and unaccompanied minors.**
- 2. It seeks intends to develop a guideline for effective and sustainable psychosocial care that meets the UASC's needs by identifying the obstacles and best practices in the conceptualization, delivery, and evaluation of psychosocial support and mental health services.**
- 3. It applies a mixed methods design including development of semi-structured interview guides in order to conduct focus-group interviews and in depth semi-structured interviews with UASC, service designers, field workers, and mental health professionals. Research methodology used in this study will benefit researchers across the world intend similarly to explore the UASC's psychosocial and mental health needs and service provision.**

## Expected results & Research Project Impact

### Expected results:

1. Extensive mapping of existing psychosocial and mental health services for UASC living in shelters and SILs
2. Clear identification of UASC's psychosocial needs and their concerns as well
3. An explanatory model which will identify the factors and processes that facilitate and/or hinder the development, delivery, and evaluation of psychosocial support and mental health services for UASC
4. A guide for developing, implementing and evaluating psychosocial support services for UASC, tailored to their needs.

**Social impact: Findings** will benefit approximately 2.000 UASC living in shelters and semi-independent living apartments in Greece, more than 2,000 field workers and community mental health professionals supporting UASC, and approximately 20 NGOs operating 54 long-term accommodation facilities. Furthermore, the research findings will benefit other countries, apart from Greece, hosting UASC who live 'in limbo', being uncertain about their future. The project will also enhance the capacity building of NGOs responsible for the operation of UASC accommodations and contribute to stress prevention and management of staff members working in UASC long-term facilities.

## Expected results & Research Project Impact *continued*

- 2. Impact on policy making/planning:** The project will make an important contribution to the policy planning and implementation by national and international agencies (e.g. Ministries, EKKA-National Center for Social Solidarity, IOM).
- 3. Impact on education and research:** Undergraduate and postgraduate students and researchers abroad will profit from the knowledge that will be produced through this nationwide study in Greece.
- 4. Impact on economy:** Findings will contribute to improved management of available financial resources so as to ensure cost-effective provision of services tailored to UASC's individual and socio-cultural needs.

## The importance of this funding

**Our research team has been actively involved since 2016 in the training and clinical supervision of field workers who support UASC. Funding support of this project is extremely important to us because the produced evidence-based findings will allow us (a) to advocate for UASC's rights to benefit from adequate psychosocial support and mental health services adapted to their needs, and (b) to devise guidelines for policy planning by key stakeholders involved (e.g. Ministries, EKKA-National Centre for Social Solidarity, International Organization for Migration, UNICEF). Moreover, this project, will enrich our teaching of field workers, community mental health professionals, undergraduate and postgraduate students; will inspire researchers; and guide policy makers to act in the best interest of UASC by facilitating their integration in our multicultural societies. Finally, two post-doctoral studies will be conducted in the framework of the present project, focusing the first, on the support of UASC involved in conflict and violence and the second, on the support of minors' involvement in alcohol and drug misuse.**





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