



Society for Pre and Post Natal Services

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ATTENTION: Air Commodore (Dr.) J. Chimedza

Permanent Secretary for Health and Child Care

**REF: REPORT ON THE 2<sup>ND</sup> SPANS COVID-19 COMMUNITY FAMILY MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS  
RESPONSE CARRIED OUT IN GOROMONZI DISTRICT IN SEPTEMBER 2020**





### **Acknowledgements**

The Society for Pre and Post Natal Services (SPANS) appreciates the invaluable technical support always accorded by the Ministry of Health and Child Care for the approval and success of this Community Outreach Programme. Of particular note is the support given by the Ministry's Department of Mental Health.

The SPANS Team also acknowledges the support from both the Mashonaland East Provincial Medical Director's (PMD) office and the Goromonzi District Medical Officer (DMO) for the facilitation of the Awareness Response, not overlooking the moral support from the District Development Coordinator's office and the Goromonzi NGO Fraternity's brotherly support.

Worthy of note is the professional assistance and health education granted by the Environmental Health Practitioners who accompanied us in every one of our outings and had the duty of disseminating and explaining to the community the very important information on the Preventative Guidelines recommended by the Ministry of Health and Child Care.

Last, but of course most important, is the support given by the different communities visited by the SPANS Team, without whose presence and cooperation the Response Exercise would not have taken place at all. The undivided attention paid by the communities to the Covid-19 Mental Health Awareness messages and their participation in the group discussions contributed in making the whole exercise a resounding success and of great benefit to the communities.

### **Objectives of the programme**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of this SPANS Covid-19 Community Family Mental Health Awareness Response was prompted by several objectives, some of which were;

- To help the community understand the distinction between "Mental Health" and "Mental Illness," two terms which are usually interchangeably used and misinterpreted even by professional healthcare practitioners;

- To instil in the community the greater need for total behavioral change in the observance of Covid-19 preventative guidelines;
- To conscientise the community against stigma and discrimination of returnees and survivors of the Covid-19 infections;
- To educate the community to exercise greater care in keeping themselves protected, granted that the pandemic is now characterised more by local infections than those confirmed among returnees;
- To discuss with the community ways in which they can best manage and resolve the mental health issues triggered by the advent of the pandemic and
- To distribute Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials in the form of “SPANS” branded hand sanitizers and face masks in the communities reached.

### **Background**

It being about six to seven months since the declaration and nationwide imposition of the National Covid-19 Lockdown recommended by the World Health Organisation internationally to help curb the spread of Covid-19 infection, because of the relaxation and variation of the Lockdown conditions, the Society for Pre and Post Natal Services (SPANS) has noted with great concern how most people seem to have adopted a relaxed and carefree attitude towards observing the prescribed preventative guidelines. Observations at most shopping centres and any public places within the urban residential locations go to show how many citizens now disregard the use of face masks, practising social distancing or even the use of hand sanitisers at shop entrances. Most citizens seem to only use face masks when visiting places where they are likely to meet Enforceent agents, like when going to shopping centres which are closely monitored by the police or when going to clinics or shops where they will not be attended without face masks , or when travelling to the Central Business District where they can’t board ZUPCO buses without face masks. People also seem to crowd inside shops, on bus queues or when mixing and mingling at drinking places with totally no regard for social distancing. All this creates a conducive breeding ground for the unfettered spread of Covid-19 infections, bringing to nought all the prior combative efforts and erasing all the gains made to date in the containment of the pandemic.

In view of all the aforesaid observations, SPANS, taking up the Inter-Ministerial Task Force’s call for behaviour change in the fight against the pandemic, undertook to take the call for total acceptance and adoption of the “new normal” as one of the key messages disseminated to the community during this Community Mental Health Awareness campaign.

### **Preparatory Activities**

After a 12 months’ extension to the Awareness Programme was granted by the Permanent Secretary for Health and Child Care, the SPANS Team started making all the preparations for the exercise, which included chartering and branding the vehicle for our mobile awareness campaign, procuring the necessary IEC materials and the PPEs for the Team and engaging the Ministry’s Environmental Health Practitioners who would be part of the multidisciplinary team. Communications were made with the local Police Administrators and the local Health Care Centres’ Administrators.

**The Community Awareness Response Outreaches carried out**

**Summary of communities reached and the total estimates of people reached**

Date	Outreach Area	No. of men reached directly	Women reached directly	Children reached directly	Estimate No. of homes reached	Estimate No. of people reached in homes (@) estimated 5 members per homestead	Total reached directly	Grand Totals reached directly and indirectly
Monday 14/9/20	Solomio Settlement	127	62	165	800	<b>4,000 people</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>4,354 people</b>
Wed 16/9/20	Eastview, Calidonia	570	968	355	2,200 homes in Phases 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10 and 12	<b>11,000</b>	<b>1,893</b>	<b>12,893 people</b>
Monday 21/9/2020	Ruwa & Zimre Park	150	210	195	200	<b>1,000</b>	<b>555</b>	<b>1,555</b>
Wednesday 23/9/2020	Walker-Mutamba settlement	64	68	56	650 homes in Eastview Phases 15, 16 & 20, and Walker & Ivhelengas	<b>3,250</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>3,438</b>
Monday 28/9/2020	Timire & Mandalay Park	49	63	55	110	<b>550</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>717</b>
Wednesday 30/9/2020	Damofalls Park	58	40	21	700	<b>3,500</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>3,619</b>
TOTALS						<b><u>23,300 people</u></b>	<b><u>3,276 people</u></b>	<b><u>26,576 people</u></b>

In all the six communities the Awareness Outreach Team went out into, an approximate total of **26,576 people** were reached out to. This figure reflects a marked increase in the number of people reached in this campaign.





The first outing was on Monday the 14<sup>th</sup> of September 2020 when the team went out into the nearby Solomio settlement. There wasn't much human traffic at the one shopping centre which is characterized by the proliferation of mostly wooden tackshops. So the team spent most of the time cruising up and down the streets broadcasting the messages over megaphones. In all, about 4,354 people were reached in the Solomio community both directly and indirectly.



On Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2020 the Team went out into Eastview settlement in Calidonia. Many people could be seen going about their business at the Gazebo Shopping centre which is the main

centre for the Calidonia settlement's numerous residential Phases. The team also visited five (5) other smaller shopping centres where the human traffic was not as dense as at Gazebo and also addressed residents at about four (4) communal water points. Quite a number of the presenting mental health issues were highlighted by the residents whom the Team interacted with at the water points and shopping centres. They spent the longer part of the day traversing the residential streets. They covered such a vast part of Eastview's streets and therefore reached out to such a large number of homesteads in the densely populated settlement, which is why the estimated total number of people reached on that day both directly and indirectly went as high as 12,893 people.



On Monday the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2020 the team was on its excursion into the Ruwa and Zimre Park urban locations. They visited four of the most frequented shopping centres and also engaged residents at five (5) borehole water points where it was observed almost all residents were observing the use of face masks, evidently because the water points are manned by supervisors who make it a point that no one accesses the water unless they are putting on their face masks. Also at the shopping centres 75% of the patrons were in face masks, which was remarkable. Not much time was spent in traversing the residential streets, which accounts for the estimated number reached on that day being 1,555 people





On Wednesday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2020 the Awareness Team went out into the Walker-Mutamba settlement, a part of the expansive Calidonia settlement. They engaged residents at two local shopping centres and one communal water point, so most time was spent going up and down the streets and addressing the residents over the megaphones. At the shopping centres and in the residential streets very little use of face masks or sanitizers was observed and the branded face masks and hand sanitisers distributed were very much appreciated. Because of the much time spent on the streets and the densely populated areas covered, the total number of people reached went up to about 3,438.



Monday 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2020 saw the Team taking the mobile Awareness Campaign to Timire and Mandalay Park communities. Timire location has no big shopping centre, so most of the campaign was done broadcasting the mental health messages by megaphone while driving up and down the streets. The team also ventured into the nearby Banks Farm and engaged the skeletal team of workers who were minding the carrots harvest. In Mandalay Park the team managed to engage the staff and Grade Seven pupils at the local Primary school. Because the day's target area is small and sparsely populated, with Mandalay having spaced homesteads on plots, the people reached were only about 717.



The last outreach was into Damofalls Park on Wednesday the 30th of September 2020. The team engaged residents at the two main shopping centres and then traversed the residential streets, covering the six Phases of the suburb. The use of face masks seemed not to be very widespread, especially among the vendors at the shops. By the end of the day, approximately 3,619 people had been reached both directly and indirectly.

#### **Key observations noted from the programme**

From the weekly review meetings held by the participating members of the SPANS Covid-19 Community Family Mental Health Awareness Programme, the following key observations were noted;

- Just the very act of the SPANS Team clarifying to the community the distinction between mental health and mental illness goes a long way in getting them to appreciate and utilize the mental health services offered by the Organisation and other mental healthcare service providers;
- The distribution of IEC material (branded face masks and hand sanitizers) helped capture the attention of the community members and left them with a constant reminder of the awareness messages;
- The expansive areas reached by the Outreach team together with the IEC materials are helping advance the cause and establishing SPANS as a household name;
- The group discussions indeed showed that there is now widespread knowledge and awareness about Covid-19 and all associated infection risks and preventative guidelines within the peri-urban communities which were targeted;
- There is evidence of knowledge about the pandemic even among the school children;
- The urban communities like Ruwa, Damofalls and Ruwa showed evidence of greater use of face masks in public places such as shopping centres and water points;



- Members of the community were able to articulate their mental health issues freely to the Team and several of them indicated willingness commence uptake of the available mental health services, especially given that SPANS is based within their vicinity and
- Regularly-conducted mental health awareness campaigns help keep the communities on the alert for potential mental health issues and serve as a reminder for them to seek timeous interventions for their management.

### **Noted causes for concern**

- Absence of enforcement-reminders in public places such as peri-urban shopping centres seems to make the community members relax and not take the necessary care;
- The further communities are from enforcement agents, the more relaxed is their observance of preventative guidelines;
- Some residents only put on their face masks on sighting police officers or other enforcement agents;
- Public alcohol outlets and drinking places seem to be characterized by little or no observance of face mask use or social distancing and
- There is very little hand sanitizing for customers in the ubiquitous tuckshops within the communities and at some of the developing shopping centres.

### **Recommendations**

In view of all the observations cited in this report, the SPANS Team has the following recommendations which could assist in promoting mental health awareness and protecting the communities' mental health from being compromised by the poor management or unavailability of relevant services;

- There is still great need for encouragement to adopt preventative behaviour change within households and the local community to ensure the spread of Covid-19 infections is curbed;
- More sensitization and community mental health awareness promotion is needed to help alleviate the negative impact of unattended mental health issues within the community which will in turn have long-term effects on the people's wellbeing;
- The SPANS Team sees great need for the printing and distribution of brochures and pamphlets as a longer-lasting medium of information communication to the community in order to promote greater mental health awareness;
- More publicization of the existence and availability of mental health interventions will help the community cope with their day to day Covid-19 issues with help from professional therapists and
- There is need for engagement of professional therapists at all Primary healthcare institutions and for all people undergoing Covid-19 tests and for those who have recovered from infection to help them manage and cope with the experience.
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## **Conclusion**

Having conducted this Mental Health Awareness Promotion exercise in communities in urban and peri-urban settings, the SPANS Team realizes the great need to take these Awareness campaigns to some outlying Goromonzi District communities who may have limited access to this vital information.

The Organisation will therefore continue sending out feelers within its well-wishers and funding partners' networks to continue sourcing funding in order to ensure sustainability of this Covid-19 Community Family Mental Health Awareness Programme.