



**Society for Pre and Post Natal Services
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**Draft
SPANS 2020 COVID-19 Family Mental Health
Preparedness and Response Plan in Zimbabwe**

Background- The Covid-19 Pandemic

As of 14 April 2020, the Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe (ROZ), through the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MOHCC), confirmed a cumulative 17 cases of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe. Looking at the global situation, more cases may be identified during and after this National Lockdown period, which therefore increases the potential of emotional, physical and psychological instability of the general population of Zimbabwe, thereby impacting their mental health and well-being.

Owing to this prevailing health crisis SPANS therefore, in response to the call by the Zimbabwe National Covid-19 Taskforce, and out of due consideration for the importance of the mental health and wellbeing of our clients and the general populace, hereby come up with a comprehensive and inclusive preparedness and response plan as a priority.

Pillars

This impressive programme is planned, mainly hinged on these four (4) pillars;

- 1- To reduce transmission of Covid-19 virus within the community through community mental health education;
- 2- To carry out a study/ surveillance on how the COVID-19 crisis affects our mental health and assist the community in management of mental health issues under the recommended hygienic guidelines;
- 3- To provide house-to-house Family Therapy for affected/infected households and
- 4- To manage the parental and frontline health workers' burnout, psychological, emotional and social impact of the Covid-19 epidemic.

PLAN OUTLINE

Task Force and Committees

First of all, SPANS intends to set up committees to oversee and coordinate this Covid-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan's successful implementation. The committees shall be overally managed by a Steering Committee which will be chaired by the SPANS Programmes Team Leader and will comprise chairpersons and/or secretaries from the subsidiary Advisory Committee, Scientific Committee, Fundraising/ Finance Committee and the Operations Committee. Terms of Reference for all Committees shall be prepared, discussed and adopted for committee members to have laid down guidelines for the Plan execution. The Committees shall meet every Friday for Operation/Action reviews, which exercise shall then assess and discuss the strengths, weaknesses, lessons learnt and areas of improvement. All preparations and activities in respect of this Preparedness and Response Plan shall be coordinated through the SPANS Programmes Team Leader, who shall be reporting to the Chief Talent Team Leader. The setting up of these committees is to ensure the systematic and coordinated implementation of the whole programme, working together with and

complementing the efforts of the Zimbabwe Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) and its existing structures. All plans and activities under this programme shall be communicated to the MoHCC.

Activities

1- Community Mental Health Awareness promotion

SPANS's raising awareness within communities will contribute to support the frontline healthcare workers by making sure that community members are aware of the pandemic and will therefore only approach the healthcare facilities with genuine suspected cases, which will enable the workers to provide high-quality, respectful treatment and care. This programme will mainly target the community because if community transmission of Covid-19 infection is low, the number of cases will decline and there is effective control of the spread of the virus.

To promote public media journalists' publishing and broadcasting the very essential mental health awareness service, SPANS will offer "**Covid-19 Mental Health Media Awards**" as an incentive to increase sensitisation.

Judging by the prevalence of fear, panic, misinformation and lack of accurate information on Covid-19 in our areas of operation and the vulnerable populations at high risk, the Programme Coordinator, working with the Operations Committee, will then arrange and deploy Protectively-equipped professional Family Therapists/Counsellors, Psychologists, Social Workers and Community Health Workers in the community and will also make efforts to arrange and use Testimonies from clients/survivors who recovered from Covid-19 in Zimbabwe. These professionals will engage the vulnerable populations and raise awareness on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC.) This will be effected through health education sessions, awareness campaigns and the distribution of Information and Education Communication (IEC) materials and flyers within the communities. The deployed staff's responsibility will be to disseminate accurate evidence-based information and give reassurance to the community who are mostly in panic-mode because of the absence of preparedness within the community and lack of satisfactory research results on the pandemic.

2- Mental Health for Frontline Healthcare Workers

All frontline healthcare workers who are currently engaged in the fight against Covid-19 are indeed overwhelmed and therefore susceptible to professional burnout. SPANS therefore aptly realises the great need for debriefing sessions to sustain the mental health and well-being of not only the SPANS Preparedness and Response Team, but also that of all other players from the MoHCC and other partners engaged in the fight. SPANS takes this need for debriefing from a collaborative approach, acknowledging how this Covid-19 fight is not a one-sector fight. The organisation will therefore continue to mobilise funding for these debriefing exercises for all frontline staff and also encourage responsible authorities to facilitate the carrying out of such exercises.

3- Surveillance and Risk Assessment

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines, one of the key requirements for a Preparedness plan is Risk communication and community engagement, whereby the organisation needs to conduct initial capacity assessment and risk analysis, including mapping of vulnerable populations within the community. SPANS therefore through a multidisciplinary team, will carry out a study/ surveillance on how the COVID-19 crisis affects the community's mental health. With the help of the general public, the multidisciplinary team hopes to on the emotional, mental, parental and frontline workers' burnout and psychological effect of the pandemic, an area which is little understood. Little is known about the emotional, mental, parental and frontline burnout and psychological effect of pandemics but with carrying out this study we can discover more. We want to really understand the nature and prevalence of emotional and stress symptoms and how they change with time in the general public.

This study will help us in identifying the affected and infected households and deploying professional therapists and trained Community Health Workers to conduct family counselling sessions. Targeting the local communities in the surrounding areas where we operate in, the organisation will strive to keep the community updated on the epidemiological situation in the country and any new findings/developments

on the epidemic and its control as communicated from the Ministry of Health and Child Care, WHO and all other trusted stakeholders. Such information will be vital in stabilising the community from the fear of infection, risk of infection and from ignorance on the pandemic.

4- Training of Field Staff

Specialists from the MoHCC's Epidemiology and Disease Control Department will train and capacitate all staff who shall be engaged to participate in this Programme so that they all be well-versed and fully informed of the magnitude of the responsibility placed upon them and also the risk they will be exposed to. All staff details, regardless of their delegated duties, shall undergo training and be satisfactorily equipped for the work at hand. All Committee members, Team Leaders, Family Therapists, Counsellors, Social Workers and engaged Community Health Workers will undergo training and orientation exercise in relation to the Covid-19 Response Programme.

SPANS through its training program will train Community Mental Health cadres to help us identify mental health issues that need our attention.

All team members will be provided with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for use when they go out into the community on their exercises to help curb the risk of infection.

5- Toll-free calls and Tele-therapy

SPANS is also going to establish a toll-free line for calls from affected/infected clients and for tips on some vulnerable families and individuals who may be exposed to infection or may unknowingly have been exposed to the Covid-19 virus either through contact or from poor hygiene practices. These toll-free lines will be manned by professional Systemic Family Therapists/Counselors who will provide the necessary mental health therapy for infected/affected individuals and their families and caregivers. On-line updates and awareness information will regularly be posted on the Social Media pages, and periodic awareness jingles and broadcasts will be aired on national and private stations countrywide.

The SPANS response team will be also help to address and provide intervention for the reports of rampant cases of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and other related issues resulting from the Covid-19 self isolation/lockdown recommendation.

6- Hosting our 2nd International Conference on Maternal Mental Health in Africa (ICAMMHA) pencilled for 12-15 December 2020

When the threat of the Covid-19 pandemic has finally abated and been eradicated or brought under reasonable control, SPANS will continue with preparations for the annual hosting of the 2nd ICAMMHA, the topics of "Disaster Preparedness" and "The effects of Disasters/Pandemics on Perinatal Mental Health" featuring for discussion and putting in place evidence-based plans for effective Response mechanism to any future occurrences.

We strongly believe that if this intervention is implemented, it will go a long way in reducing the spread of infections and will definitely help in the management of mental health issues emanating from the Covid-19 epidemic.