

# CORONA VIRUS RISK & MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

## INTRODUCTION

Masimanyane Women's Rights International (MWRI) is a social justice and equality seeking organisation working to end violence against women and girls. MWRI bases its approach on the human rights framework and the principles of the CEDAW convention, including substantive equality, non-discrimination and state accountability.

## FACTS

Corona viruses are a large family of viruses that cause illnesses ranging from common colds to more severe illnesses. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a new strain of the virus that was discovered in 2019 and had not been previously found in humans.

COVID-19 has become a serious global concern due to the huge impact it is having on many countries around the world. It is highly infectious with an incubation period of 10-14 days which means that an infected person can roam around passing on this infection without knowing they have it.

COVID-19 has resulted in the deaths of more than 8,000 people globally with more than 200,000 infected. It started in China where more than 80,000 were infected but it has since been transmitted across Europe which is now the new global epi-centre.

The severity, speed and breadth of COVID-19's transmission is causing such grave concern that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has labelled it a global pandemic. Governments around the world were slow to respond at first but because of the rise in infections and deaths, were forced to put drastic measures in place to try to contain the pandemic. Many countries have now gone into lockdown where populations have been requested and forced into social distancing/isolation.

While most African countries have not seen a significant rise in COVID-19 infections, it is generally believed that the corona virus will take hold in countries where there is high population density, poverty levels and poor health infrastructure. There is a very real fear that it will cause devastation across communities and across countries. To this end, African governments are rushing to put measures in place to try to stop COVID-19 from taking hold across Africa.

## SOUTH AFRICA'S RESPONSE

South African president Cyril Ramaphosa has declared the corona virus a national disaster and has requested all sectors of our nation to work together to prevent the spread of the virus.

He has also urged all citizens to adopt social distancing / isolation, where possible, to help prevent the spread of the disease.

## GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP

The Board of Masimanyane is currently developing a policy on epidemic and pandemic management, including the corona virus pandemic currently besieging the global community. This will be finalised by 20 March 2020.

## OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES

The Masimanyane Board and its management team have held discussions to consider how the organisation can heed President Cyril Ramaphosa's call for social distancing / isolation and a national lock down. We have to consider the services which we provide knowing that they, to a great degree, constitute "essential services" for those experiencing gender-based violence.

The counselling, paralegal and first responder rape services all fall into this category. We also know that when people are socially isolated, there is a real and increased risk of an escalation in violence, particularly domestic violence. We considered the responsibility we have to the women and girls of our province and to our staff for whom we hold primary responsibility.

Masimanyane is framing its response within the values and principles of human rights which includes but are not limited to:

- The right of everyone to safety and protection
- The right to health and wellbeing
- The right to accurate, correct and current information
- The right to access to care and support
- The right to participation and inclusion (all voices listened to)
- Accountability by the state and citizens.

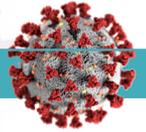
With these principles in mind, and taking into consideration the requirements of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and other related legislation, Masimanyane has crafted a strategy for responding to COVID-19 balancing the needs of the community and ensuring the safety of staff.

## RISK MITIGATION

### Community Counselling and Paralegal Services

Masimanyane management agreed that there is a real risk in keeping the services up and running in the way they do now.

We do also recognise, however, that there is the risk of increased acts of violence against women and girls, hence we



## **CORONA VIRUS RISK & MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (CONT.)**

have to balance the needs of the community with the safety and protection of staff.

A decision was made to close the physical offices and to provide remote services to women in distress utilising various platforms that could continue to provide counselling support to those who seek it. We are placing adverts through radio, in print and electronic media with telephone numbers and our website address through which we can be contacted.

### **COMMUNITY EDUCATION SERVICES**

All community education programmes will be locked down as from Thursday 19 March until further notice. This includes, campaigns, training, workshops, meetings, seminars and all other community gatherings. Staff will be on hand to respond to questions and queries via telephone and/or website monitoring.

**For information and clarifications, call 043 7439169.**

### **ESSENTIAL SERVICES - THUTHUZELA CARE SERVICES**

Masimanyane recognises that the 24-hour rape trauma containment services are critical for survivors and those services will remain fully operational at this time.

We are making the necessary arrangements to ensure the safety of staff by providing them with protective wear, sanitation products to ensure high levels of hygiene and providing them with transport to avoid the challenge of commuting in crowded public transport.

### **ESSENTIAL SERVICE - SHELTER**

The shelter services are important to women and their children whose lives are at risk due to domestic and sexual violence.

The shelter will operate fully during this lock down phase with all the support currently provided but with additional activities to support both the women and their children who will be socially isolated.

We will suspend most external contact with the courts and health care facilities except where absolutely unavoidable. Additional support for staff is being put in place including safe, protected transport to and from work.

### **COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

We have already updated our website with information on the corona virus including what it is, how it is transmitted and what possible prevention strategies there are. We will explain social distancing /isolation as suggested by the

World Health Organisation.

We have contacted various radio stations requesting slots to discuss the national disaster emergency strategies and to provide information on where and how Masimanyane can be reached.

We are placing adverts in local newspapers in English and IsiXhosa with contact details. We will share information and regular updates using all our social media platforms. We have set up various Whatsapp groups with our community groups so that we will be in a position to share information with them as well.

We will be disseminating information on our strategy with all our partners, donors and stakeholders and updating them weekly.

### **GENERAL SUPPORT FOR STAFF**

Staff have been given training on new ways of working when doing so remotely.

Protocols for remote work have been developed for those providing telephone counselling.

An adjusted data collection protocol was developed and staff trained in using it.

A psychologist has been made available to provide support to staff to address the possible challenges to being socially distanced/isolated and still working with clients albeit remotely. This will include telephonic counselling and trauma debriefing for staff.

We have reassured staff that their jobs are secure throughout this crisis phase.

We have agreed to provide staff with additional sick leave should anyone be infected. This is to encourage reporting of symptoms and illnesses.

We are providing staff with flu injections (currently not available throughout the country but on order).

We are providing staff with immune boosters and alternative therapy support (meditation practices)

We have identified the need to appoint Safety Health Reps and each team is identifying someone who can play this role. They will receive online training from an accredited trainer while working from home.

We will brief staff and our clients at least once a week on the status of these decisions and the thinking of the organisation.

### **Thank you**

### **MASIMANYANE WOMEN'S RIGHTS INTERNATIONAL MANAGEMENT TEAM**

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