

## **COVID-19 AFRICA: ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND HUMAN RIGHTS CONSERNS.**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Covid-19 is a global health crisis that is spreading across the world. It's up-surged in China in 2019 and its impact on the world economy calls for continuous proactive measures. But what is unknown and yet to be unravelled is the root cause of this pandemic and the level of its spread which varies from one country to another and the efforts been put in place by the affected countries to curtail the spread. The disease has killed thousands of people globally.

Covid-19 is a threat to every person and communities, considering the rate at which the virus spread in kano state. If the spread which has surpassed that of Lagos state where the virus was detected is not control, Nigeria is likely to be on fire. All are at risk, people that we most often work with at office especially social workers currently working with the vulnerable are potentially at particular risk. For example, some social development assistants and other professionals are under greater stress because they have less access to protective factors such as healthcare, good nutrition, good housing, education, safe home and social networks. Stresses are increasing for many as a result of job loss, stay at home requirements, school closures among others.

Ethical dilemmas are problems with no clear standard or rules determining process for a specific situation. Social workers must manage value, moral and behaviour within the context of legal and regulatory obligations. Social workers stand with the vulnerable group and disadvantaged to advocate, promote and protect their human rights violation which include poverty, hunger and homeless.

The ethical guidance for social workers aims to respond to the very specific circumstances generated by covid-19 which disrupts health, safeguarding and support services. Practitioners working in

emergency situations may face choices and decisions that go far beyond the bounds of ethics and practices, including rationing of support and resources and more stringent prioritisation.

It is important to note that an ethical response by social workers to dealing with Covid-19 is not only about the decisions or actions taken by individual social workers, employers, other professionals and the governments

## **ETHICS OF PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE CARE**

Social workers or social development practitioners working in some social work settings are facing different challenges during the pandemic, these include: personal health concerns, caring responsibilities, financial worries and many other issues that impact on our capability to offer support to others.

It is essential for the practitioners to be aware of their own care, needs and worries, seek help and to look after themselves and each other in difficult times, Kindness to self and others will be crucial for wellbeing and morale

### **Ethical responsibilities of social workers as members of the community**

Social workers are part of the communities and their ethical responsibilities do not end when they leave the workplace but extend to every aspect of their lives. Ethical considerations should be paramount in all our dealings.

### **Practical Experiences**

#### **Case 1. Relief items to Internally Persons (IDPs) Camp:**

I was called without prior notice to join others in the distribution of food items, drugs and others to IDPs Camp. We were accompanying by two officers of the Civil Defence Corps serving the Ministry but the Police Areas commands were not officially notified. We were

only giving a Pass letter. I told my boss that we might have security issues during the assignment but she said that there won't be any problem. We work till 11.30pm distributing the items when Police patrol team stormed our last location asking for Police Permit. We were interrogated and detained but it was our I.D CARDS and the PASS LETTER with some calls that eventually safe us.

**Lesson: Social workers should always practice safety precautions in their work. Safety assessment and risk reduction with all clients and in all settings should be practice always**

#### **Case 2: Children in emergency:**

**>In the case of child sexual abuse during the lock down, the unwillingness of the parents to stand to prosecute the abuser is very challenging. Social workers have the ethical obligation to report the case' To report or not to report becomes ethical dilemma since the parents were not willing.**

#### **Case 3. Humanitarian setting:**

**>In humanitarian settings there have been report of adolescent girls and vulnerable ones willing to exchange sex for relieve materials. Social workers have an obligation to protect the dignity and worth of the children but lock down is affecting the process.**

#### **Case 4. Cultural Belief**

**>Culture in some cases promotes abuse. Eg child marriage. While the social worker has the ethical obligation to protect the child, it's often hard to deal with.**

#### **Case 5. Correctional Institutions (Prisons service)**

**>Due to poor government policy, lack of incentives, inadequate sophisticated or latest tools to work and shortage of prison social workers or lack of recognition of the roles of social workers the few**

**social workers working in the correctional centres were afraid of risk of facing both visitors and inmates without adequate supply of gadgets.**

#### **Case 6. Policy areas:**

**>Social Work has not been given the right of place in the country e.g social worker are not included on the Presidential Task Force (PTF ) on covid-19 although social workers are playing their roles in various settings. This inhibits wholistic intervention approach by government.**

1. Social workers should follow government and public health, evidence-based behaviours are required to save lives and as professionals we should uphold them
2. Government guidance is regularly updated to respond to the developing threat from covid-19. We have a responsibility to keep up to the date with the latest developments for ourselves, our loved ones and for the people we work with
3. All members are encouraged to contribute to community support and volunteering activities where this is possible and safe to do so
4. Access to food and medicine has been a challenge for many groups including older people with pre-existing conditions and critical key workers [e.g. Medical Doctors, Nurses, Police, Teachers and social workers] equitable access is needed, and systems need to be put up in place to support this
5. Social workers who remain registered with their regulatory body, who do not have other fixed commitments and who are in good

health/not in group considered either vulnerable or extremely vulnerable to covid-19 should consider returning to practice. Your skills are needed. Many local authorities and other social work agencies will experience high levels of vacancies as staff fall sick or need to self-isolate

6. Similarly, social workers who have recent experience of practice, but whose registration has expired should consider registering so they can re-enter practice. Your contribution to our workforce is needed