

STAFF CARE & SUPPORT DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

This briefing note from the Gender-based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) summarizes key considerations for staff working on GBV prevention, mitigation and response in relation to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak.

Organizations, managers, and staff committed to staff well-being should promote opportunities and platforms to keep staff informed and connected to each other. Emergencies are always stressful, but specific stressors particular to COVID-19 outbreak affect the population in general and front line workers specifically. Stressors include:

- Common symptoms of other health problems (e.g. a fever) can be mistaken for COVID-19 and lead to fear of being infected.
- Risk of being infected and infecting others, especially if the transmission mode of COVID-19 is not 100% clear.
- Fear of being separated from loved ones and caregivers due to community quarantine, lockdown orders and border shutdowns.
- Feelings of helplessness, boredom, loneliness and depression due to being isolated.
- Reduced capacity to use social support due to intense work schedules and stigma within the community towards front line workers.
- Increased vulnerability of female staff to intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence due to isolation and heightened tensions in the household.
- Lack of access to personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Risk of being stigmatized due to presumed exposure to infected people mainly for those who continue to work on the front lines.
- Frustration given the inability to provide the usual set of lifesaving care and support to gender-based violence (GBV) survivors due to stay-at-home lockdown orders.
- Feeling powerless in referring GBV survivors to appropriate services due to an overwhelmed health-care, social welfare and protection system.



Prioritizing staff safety and well-being promote individual and organizational resiliency that creates a lasting positive impact for everyone involved.

STAFF CARE AND SUPPORT SHOULD BE PRIORITIZED DURING THIS COVID-19 CRISIS. HERE ARE KEY GOOD PRACTICES THAT MAY BE CONSIDERED:

- Give staff the opportunity to talk about their specific concerns with regard to hygiene and infection management, travel restrictions, self-isolation advice and contingency planning in the event of office closures and work from home arrangements.
- Disseminate accurate information regularly about the COVID-19 crisis including the list of hospitals in their duty station that can receive cases of severe acute respiratory illness due to COVID-19 and accompanying health insurance guidance.
- Address queries related to processing of salaries and applying for annual or sick leaves.
- Create spaces for staff to discuss quality of life concerns and communicate their ideas and priorities for the COVID-19 readiness and response operations.
- Promote positive coping or self-care strategies such as maintaining social contact with coworkers, loved ones, family members, friends via voice/video calls or text messages, adhering to a healthy lifestyle (including a proper diet, sleep, regular exercise), and decreasing the time spend watching or listening to upsetting media coverage.
- Give staff the time and resources they need to comfort, care for and, homeschool their children. Provide helpful tools that encourage talk, play and other forms of stimulation that children need from caregivers.
- Offer options for remote or online counseling including specific remote support and safety planning to staff who might experience intimate partner violence. Recognize that support needs will be different based on individual experiences of stress.

- Find or clarify roles with staff who cannot do their usual work because of the crisis so they can continue to feel valuable to the organization and useful in the situation. Be open and available to problem-solving.
- If you do not know how to respond to difficult stories or information, consider comforting statements or messages like:
 - You are not alone.
 - We think about you and your loved ones often.
 - I'm sorry this is happening/has happened.
 - Is there anything we can do?
 - We are with you. Many people are with you and want the best for you.
 - *Note: If you know the staff member personally, reinforce their strengths, for example positive attitude, empathy, kindness, or how their presence gives hope to others.*
- Provide a feedback and complaints mechanism to address issues according to defined policies and procedures.

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