

Chapter 3

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Persons in Quarantine and Isolation Facilities During the COVID–19 Pandemic in Namibia: A Multi–Sectoral Response

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors describe the essential need of mental health and psychosocial support for people accommodated in mandatory quarantine and isolation facilities during the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic in Namibia through a multi-sectoral response. Namibia recorded its first two index cases on 13 March 2020 when a married couple arrived in the Windhoek district in Namibia from Madrid, Spain on 11 March 2020. Namibia has since March 2020 provided supervised quarantine services to 12,128 persons in facilities around the country. The Ministry of Health and Social Services provides mental health and psychosocial support services, which were critical in the short and long-term response to COVID-19 pandemic. Public health measures were developed in line with WHO guidelines to contain the virus. These measures include the need of setting up quarantine and isolation facilities. Recommendations for future research in strengthening mental health and psychosocial support services and coping strategies are provided in the chapter.

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INTRODUCTION

In the light of the worldwide outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, His Excellency, Dr. Hage Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia demonstrated strong leadership in declaring a State of Emergency in terms of Sub-Article (5) of Article (26) of the Namibian Constitution of 1990. In the Namibian Government's containment efforts to curb the transmission and spread of COVID-19, special measures under the State of Emergency have been put in place through phase Lockdown measures. One of the measures under the State of Emergency was the Stage 1 Lockdown of 21 days (from 27 March – 17 April 2020), which was applicable to the Khomas- and Erongo regions, inclusive of the Okavango and Rehoboth Municipality areas. This lockdown was extended with fourteen (14) days from 18 April until 04 May 2020. The 3rd Stage of Lockdown was effective from the 1st of June 2020 until 29 June 2020. The 4th Stage of Lockdown has been effective from 29th June until 17th September 2020, which will also terminate the six months of State of Emergency declared. With reference to the afore-mentioned, further directives were given by the President of the Republic of Namibia to provide mandatory quarantine and isolation facilities for returning Namibian citizens and permanent residents for a period of fourteen (14) days of supervised quarantine. Furthermore, directives were issued by the President of the Republic of Namibia to provide alternative accommodation to persons without shelter for a period of at least three (3) months, effective from April to June 2020.

In response to the afore-mentioned Lockdown measures, the Government of the Republic of Namibia activated a National Health Emergency Coordination Committee on COVID-19 under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Social Services. In addition, an Incident Management System was established to strengthen the operationalization of the National Public Health Emergency Operation Center (NPHEOC), which become the central hub from where all COVID-19 responders operated. In prioritizing the health of all Namibians amid COVID-19, a multi-sectoral response team was established, which comprised of government sectors, development partners, higher education institutions, private sector, faith-based organizations and civil society organizations. All these multi-sectoral partners collaborated efforts in the development of a Multi-Sectoral National Response Plan for COVID-19 in Namibia.

In accordance with the WHO Guidelines (2020), informed by the country context, a customized Multi-Sectoral National Response Plan for COVID-19 in Namibia comprised of nine technical pillars namely:

1. Country Coordination, Planning and Monitoring
2. Risk Communication and Community Engagement
3. Surveillance & Contact Tracing
4. Points of Entry
5. Laboratory Coordination
6. Case Management
7. Infection Prevention and Control
8. Operations and Logistics
9. Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

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