

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PERSON'S WITH DISABILITIES

SOUTHERN AFRICA SOCIAL PROTECTION EXPERT NETWORK
2022 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
11TH MAY, 2022

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Introduction



- Persons with disabilities (PWDs) constitute a vulnerable group in society that generally have more health care needs than others and have limited capacity to cope and adapt to shocks.
- PWDs are faced with multiple risks to their health, safety, food security and livelihoods by virtue of their disabilities.
- They are usually disproportionately affected by humanitarian emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.



- The negative societal **effects of COVID-19**, in many cases, have been more profound when viewed through the lens of PWDs, especially those in developing countries.
- This is because the pandemic has intensified existing inequalities and vulnerabilities while simultaneously exposing and intensifying **weaknesses in already deficient and fragile health and social protection systems.**

STUDY OBJECTIVES



- Assess the levels of access to information on COVID-19 prevention measures by PWDs
- Establish the extent to which PWDs have been included in the National Response mechanism for COVID-19 prevention
- Assess the effects of COVID-19 on PWDs
- Establish and assess the **effectiveness of the mitigation measures employed by PWDs** to cope with the effects of COVID-19
- Formulate recommendations and lessons learnt to ensure effective design and implementation of measures that mitigate the challenges faced by PWDs.

STUDY FINDINGS

ACCESS TO INFORMATION



- All respondents reported to have had **access to information on COVID-19**.
- The Ministry of Community Development and Social Services had put in place a COVID-19 Communication Strategy that was being implemented at district level throughout Zambia.
- The Ministry had also engaged local radio stations in disseminating information on COVID-19.
- In order to ensure that all PWDs had access to COVID-19 information, the Ministry had ensured that its communication strategy encompassed the transcription of material into formats and languages that could be accessed by Persons with various forms of disability.
- The study however, showed that more needed to be done by the Ministry to ensure the effective implementation of its communication strategy.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION



- **Radio and television** were the main sources of COVID-19 information.
- The Study revealed that the sources of information were skewed towards specific types of disabilities.
- Persons with sensory disabilities such as **the deaf and blind had no access to certain sources of information** such as radio and television respectively.

APPROPRIATENESS OF LANGUAGE AND FORMAT



- **88%** of PWDs interviewed reported that the languages and formats in which they accessed information on COVID-19 were appropriate and effective.
- However, some concerns on the format were reported by Persons with sensory disabilities such as the use of radio and television programmes by the deaf and blind respectively.
- The daily statistic updates by the Ministry of Health were placed on an orange background with a small font, which was a challenge for visually impaired individuals.
- Also, the bright colours were not conducive for autistic people as they were likely to cause a panic attack.

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Health Guidelines



- **Social distancing** was the most challenging health guideline to observe, with 23% of respondents indicating that they had difficulties adhering to it.
- An interview with one of the organisations revealed that **the visually impaired required a physical guide to hold their hand** and therefore, it had been difficult to observe social distancing with a guide.

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CHANGES TO LIFESTYLE



- All respondents affirmed that their lifestyles had changed since the spread of COVID-19.
- These included the following:
 - Confinement and restriction of movement
 - Reduced working hours and inability to sell goods
 - Limited socialization
 - Increased poverty
 - Increased dependence on benefactors and
 - Financial strain of buying Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

ABILITY TO MEET DAILY NEEDS



- All respondents affirmed that COVID-19 had affected their ability to meet daily needs.
- Majority of the respondents (57%) mentioned experiencing an increase in the cost of goods whereas a few (4%) reported not receiving money from donations and the scarcity of goods.
- The primary area in which respondents had experienced increased expenses was in groceries and food expenditure (46%) with the lowest being internet and phone access (6%).

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON HEALTH



- All the respondents faced challenges in protecting their health during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The two most common challenges faced were;
 - Access to medicines; and
 - Access to PPE

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION



- One organisation reported that **children with disabilities had withdrawn from school altogether.**
- Another mentioned that **parents had been hiding children with disabilities** because of social distancing.
- The pandemic presented unique **challenges for learners with Down Syndrome.**
- Access to education had been more difficult because Down syndrome sufferers were not supposed to be exposed to unhealthy environments due to an already compromised immune system.



- The closure of schools had greatly impacted learners because students with **Down Syndrome had forgotten most of the things that they were taught.**
- Therefore, when schools did open, they were forced to **start afresh and cover what had already been taught.**
- This ultimately affected their education delivery.

THE INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ON GOVERNMENT'S NATIONAL RESPONSE AND CONSULTATION OF PWDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES

- **76%** of the respondents surveyed indicated that they had not attended a COVID-19 related meeting while only **24%** indicated that they had.
- Organisations were asked whether they were **aware of PWDs being consulted and involved in the development and implementation** of the COVID-19 response measures.
- Contrasting responses were recorded.
- In some cases, organisations revealed that PWDs were not fully involved and consulted in the development of these measures.
- Only one organization was involved in the development of COVID-19 response measures.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE



- The Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) were mandated to provide social protection programs and interventions such as the COVID-19 Emergency Cash Transfer, which is a cash relief for vulnerable persons.
- The transfer amount **(K400/ \$18.13) to be paid for a period of six months)** was higher than the regular Social Cash Transfer because of the increased needs brought about by the pandemic.
- **76%** of respondents surveyed indicated that they had not received COVID-19 financial assistance.
- **24%** on the other hand indicated that they had received financial assistance.
- However, some of the respondents that had received assistance expressed that it was either a once off, or irregularly given, hence rendering the COVID-19 financial assistance somewhat inadequate to meet their needs.

SUPPORT NEEDED TO COPE WITH COVID-19



- 28% of the respondents indicated that the support they needed the most was of a financial nature
- 18% indicated they needed priority support for PWDs
- 16% said they needed help with groceries and food; as well as PPE and
- Only 4% said they needed assistance with medicine and drugs.
- The responses given are a further indication that the current financial assistance being rendered through the SCT and the COVID-19 Cash Transfer were inadequate to meet the needs of PWDs during this pandemic.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE EFFECTIVE DESIGN OF MEASURES TO MITIGATE THE EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- There is need to increase in social protection programmes tailored for PWDs. Most organizations and PWDs were of the view that the current social protection programs and the emergency cash transfer implemented during the pandemic were not inclusive and sufficient enough for PWDs.
- There is need to include and consult persons with disabilities in the development and implementation of COVID-19 response and mitigation measures as well as in all national development efforts.
- Government is urged to disseminate information on COVID-19 preventive and mitigation measures in appropriate formats and language.
- Government is urged to ensure the availability of PPEs in special schools and organizations that interact with PWDs, as most of them could not afford to buy masks and sanitizers.
- Government and its implementing partners, especially local authorities must provide lower and accessible hand washing stations to cater for persons on wheelchairs, as most washing points in public places tend to be high and inaccessible to persons on wheelchairs.

**THANK
YOU**

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