

Covid-19 Pandemic Crucial Guidelines for Social Workers

By Lena Dominelli, University of Stirling, Email: lena.dominelli@stir.ac.uk

Introduction

Social workers, social care workers, and welfare assistants serving the public under Covid-19 require guidelines for anti-oppressive working (AOP) and to protect their own and service users' health. Knowledge about this coronavirus is limited and uncertain. Social workers' generic skills are relevant and include:

Anti-oppressive principles and practice (AOP):

- Treating people with respect and dignity.
- Doing no harm, neither to others nor to yourself.
- Being prepared for ethical dilemmas, e.g., if home visiting without personal protective gear (PPE).
- Being kind and compassionate within existing guidelines for practice.
- Reducing sources of fear by explaining issues clearly and simply.
- Providing counselling if required, referring people to specialist services, especially in dealing with mental ill health, grief and loss which can include fatalities, loss of liberties and normal routines.
- Active listening and understanding the local situation.
- Engaging service users in improvising and coproducing new solutions.
- Tailoring your responses to be locality specific and culturally relevant to the setting.
- Looking for strengths and capabilities to build upon, without ignoring problematic issues.
- Being critically reflective and aware of the impact of social issues such as poverty, discrimination.
- Knowing what resources are available among individuals, families and communities and how to refer onwards, access alternative resources, and obtain training for yourself and others.
- Supporting the volunteers who support you.

Protecting yourself and others when delivering services:

- Social and physical distancing (keeping 2 metres distance), staying home, working from home wherever possible, not attending public gatherings, gigs or other events.
- Following safety precautions as advised by health authorities: wearing masks and/or protective clothing; not touching your face, eyes, nose and mouth; washing hands with soap and water frequently; binning used tissues and other paper products properly; disinfecting hard surfaces.
- Give service users advance warning (electronically or by post) of visiting wearing PPE.
- Be vigilant to spot safeguarding issues as living in the same space, social tensions and stress within relationships can lead to higher levels of child and elder abuse and intimate partner violence.
- Find resources, e.g., counselling,, for those who feel socially isolated and/or mentally ill.
- Encourage those staying at home to undertake activities, exercises and digital games, safely.

Self-care:

- Engage in self-care by risk assessing and defining what you need and what self-care means to you.
- Access support and supervision among peers and managers, Including debriefing regularly.
- Form and use your peer-support group to consider different scenarios and ethical dilemmas that you might encounter doing home visits, agency visits, or delivering services.
- If traumatised by your experiences, speak to your manager and obtain appropriate psychosocial support, which may be needed for some time.
- Learn from other people's experiences (professional and personal), including from overseas.
- Be prepared to improvise and seek information , but ensure you do so safely.
- Trust your reflective, critical and innovative capacities to check out what you hear, say or do.
- Be prepared: take a thermos flask with you; wear disposable gloves; disinfect surfaces like those in your home, office and car and dispose of PPE carefully. Wash hands with soap and water asap.
- Stay home and self-isolate if you feel ill to avoid spreading the coronavirus to others. Discuss your situation with your line manager, obtain the best possible online advice support to begin with.
- Keep and make available a record of where you have been and whom you have contacted.
- Stay calm, stay safe, and stay connected while keeping your social and physical distance!
- You are an essential, if sometimes undervalued worker!