

LEADERSHIP IN THE TIMES OF COVID PANDEMIC

Experiences of frontline social workers



PARTNERS FOR ANTI-TRAFFICKING

SANJ5G

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OF COVID PANDEMIC
EXPERIENCES OF
FRONTLINE SOCIAL
WORKERS



The exercise was done with some social workers from the field to understand their thoughts, feelings and unexpressed emotions using visual imagery. Sometimes verbalising the internal emotional experience during a stressful period becomes difficult. And communication becomes like a rant and continuous narration of overwhelming actions. To enable expression of these and to gather some insights into ones inner world, this kind of method would be useful so the experiment.

The exercise steps:



Social workers were given 8 images of various roles that leaders may take in different situations



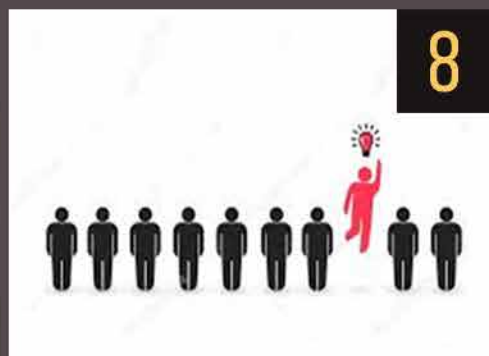
They were asked to choose any 1 image that can identify in their present situation which aptly describes their emotional situation AS OF TODAY. Identify that emotion.



And then they had to talk for a minute on who they are in that image, what in the picture resonates with them and share an example from last 2 weeks that can demonstrate this experience and identity that they see through that selected image/ picture.



Where am I in my work situation? What kind of leadership am I experiencing?





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This period in my life has shown me the power of collaborative action – between all organisations, survivors and other government service providers. I am away from field organisations, but very connected to field actions, social workers innovative thinking and experiments, bold methods of communication. And this united thinking and action taking will take us very far, have a deep positive impact on us AND as a team we shall achieve the “crown of success” and better social change (the shadow). I see these positive impacts from this negative situation.





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I am the nodal coordinating person; the focal point of contact for many survivors, other social workers, several government officials, other NGOs. Due to the difficulty in mobility, I receive lots of urgent, distressing and useful information from many points, I listen, consolidate, connect and communicate to others when that is required.





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All are at home due to this lockdown. Everyone is distant and stuck where they are. Even after speaking to all over phones, i don't feel connected. RB is one of the survivors who is HIV+. Difficulties with medication and travelling to ART are difficult. I wish i could have taken her for this urgent treatment but has been very difficult to arrange for an ambulance. I feel restless and overwhelmed by what i am unable to do at present. And even when i do come up with solutions and take some actions, i keep feeling that the next time, i shall fail in future. I shall have no control to combat.





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I was part of a circle, a circle of survivors, dutybearers and social workers in Basirhat 2 block. I don't live there and would travel everyday because that is where “my circle of people” stay. In this lockdown, i got disconnected and thrown out of the circle, i feel. I cannot travel to my team and meet them, share emergency supplies with them . I keep engaging with the BDO through calls and whatsapp messages and she doesn't respond so many times. I remember how i used to reach her office in person and get her to feel energised and initiate actions,. But now i am out of that circle too. Makes me feel helpless.





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I play almost 8 different roles in my life-mother, wife, daughter, social worker, coordinator, friend etc And all these roles had some different physical spaces. This lockdown has brought all my roles into the domestic / home space. This has disrupted the differentiated roles and sometimes i am unable to perform some of my roles as the boundaries have become blurred (the shadow in the image). The merging of these roles, the blurring of boundaries, makes me very helpless, sad. This is painful as many roles don't get their due, don't get done well, don't get space anymore and i feel pained.





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Others are scattered all around, I listen to many separate messages and calls, collate and then coordinate for actions. I called 34 survivors over the last 3 days to understand what services from the government they have received, from whom, under which scheme, what they are still not being able to access or get. And i put it all together to make sense of the overall picture.





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I feel unarmed and disconnected from everyone. How do i gather and collect and connect with everyone? How does one work as an organised and connected team? I have distanced myself from others, but it hasn't distanced me from my work and hours that i work. This lockdown and situation has made me question my worth and performance. I am harder with myself. I seem to be working more as if to prove my productivity and importance in the team. My benchmark for myself has risen and i keep scrambling to finish work, prove to myself that i am working well. I feel all is disrupted.





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I feel alone and stuck in a space that is limited/closed. This circle is like a boundary that I cannot cross, cannot get across. It makes me very anxious and tense and makes my inability so large in my eyes. I am finding it difficult to connect with others... this is scaring me.

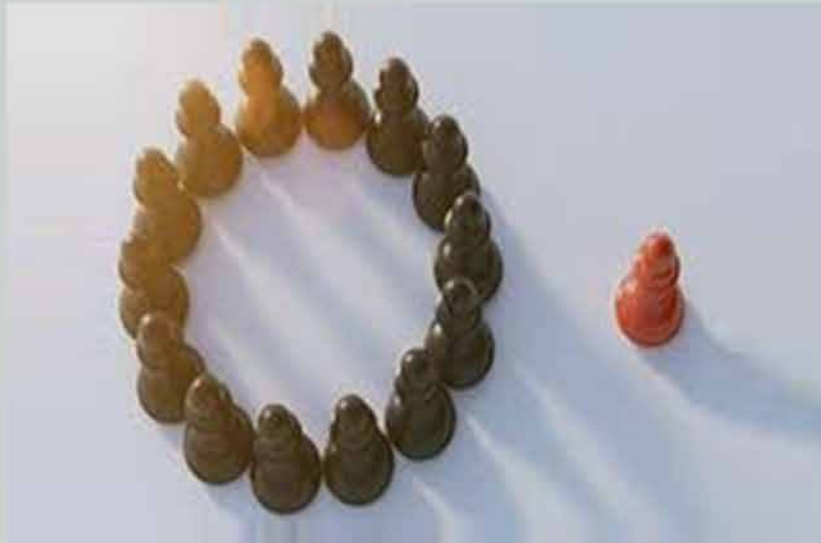




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The lockdown was so sudden. Led to immense difficulties in survivors. I went to some of the houses myself to deposit some relief materials. But those are few. I seem distant and disconnected from most and am unable to fulfil many needs that they have. Needs are so much more. Services and supplies are inadequate. I feel locked down and blocked. I am also severely tensed and fearful about my health, death and the future that lies ahead. I seem to be floating away from lots of connection to be being very lonely.





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I feel very alone on some days. Survivors with their difficulties and challenges and constant sharing with each other seem more connected with each other. I feel I can see them in solidarity and in this together and i try to be a part of that from the outside, encouraging them to remain so. There are also moments where I think that at this age of 65 I have reason to celebrate since this alone-ness in this lockdown has taught me to use zoom, send video clips and voice recordings, organise con-calls as a coordinator...these were unthinkable for me, but I did it. So maybe things are not that hopeless either.



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