

The Easter Holidays, COVID-19 and Communities

By Nthabiseng Nkhasi, John Richards and Emmanuel Matshomo

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The Easter weekend holidays have always been a time when families and friends meet and have gatherings as they share memories and get to be with their extended families. Last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic first arrived, South Africa was in the middle of Level 5 lockdown and so could not gather with extended family and friends.

On 30 March 2021, President Ramaphosa addressed the nation about the amended rules and regulations for the Easter weekend under Level 1 lockdown. In his statement, he said that places such as liquor stores and other retail outlets selling alcohol (sale of alcohol for off-site consumption) would be closed from Friday to Sunday but that restaurants, bars and shebeens selling alcohol (onsite sales of alcohol) would be open until 11pm each night. He also increased the capacity of public gatherings (such as church services) to 250 people indoors and 500 people outdoors.

These rules made some people believe the pandemic has been defeated and many now continue walking around without wearing their masks while other people are still sceptical of COVID-19. Places like taverns are hotspots in townships because at most taverns people don't practice social distancing or wear masks and during public holidays like Easter, the taverns are usually overcrowded. But taverns are not the only places that were over-crowded with people not paying attention to the rules – nightclubs, restaurants and local parks were also full as well, even though these places sometimes have COVID-19 signage to alert people.

Sizwe Ngwenya, a youth of Tsakane said; "Others then celebrate these days by attending a lot of events where they mostly get to drink and have a nice time". According to him people tend to abuse alcohol during holidays like Easter weekend. In many communities, people who are inebriated from alcohol are often targets for muggings, and other terrible crimes. Many fights also break out because of alcohol.

In Kliptown (a township south-west of Johannesburg), home to many informal settlements, the long weekend started on Thursday, 1 April 2021 and this was true for many all around the country. Many Kliptown residents enjoyed themselves with festivities but did not apply lockdown rules of using masks, sanitisers and physical distancing. Taverns were full and the Kliptown community hosted a soccer tournament. The tournament was successful but in a way it was also not successful because residents were not physical distanced and not wearing their masks.

Malcolm (not his real name) is an elderly resident aged 68, who stays in Kliptown. He said that he worries about his health because he carries the burden of the disease of high blood pressure. "Elderly people are the most vulnerable [with COVID-19] so I know my health is of utmost importance," Malcolm said. He complained about the youth because, "they are always in groups and they never worry, even with coronavirus outbreak in the country. They know there are also [elderly] people who are in my situation and who stay with their grandkids and families but these elders are not considered because their grandchildren are always in the streets in huge groups. These children don't take into consideration that the elders are the most vulnerable."

A young man from Kliptown (aged 23), spoke about how the conditions of coronavirus is starting to scare him because he had a family member that had passed on due to COVID-

19. It was very sad for this young man the way the deceased was buried because even the family could not see the deceased person's face and also they had to stand far away from the deceased person's coffin.

"It was very traumatic and in a way I wear my mask everywhere I go because I have witnessed something very tragic and I really don't want any person to experience the same thing I experienced. Now I make sure I educate others because the more our youth is educated about COVID-19, the less infections can break out. Also our elders are the most vulnerable. In a way they are disadvantaged because of the burden of diseases [they carry] and we as young people, we have to make sure our elders are kept safe and that we also apply the proper regulations under COVID-19."

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