Whoever Controls the Past, Controls the Future: Archives and Records Management Practitioners' Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in South Africa

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Abstract

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic in 2020. Most countries around the world, including South Africa, have imposed national lockdowns. COVID-19 was declared a national disaster in South Africa in March 2020, in accordance with the Disaster Management Act, 2002. The Act, among other things, recognises the importance of having access to reliable disaster information, as well as information management and communication systems for storing, disseminating, and exchanging information. Additionally, in April 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) issued a declaration calling for shared responsibility in preserving the documentary heritage that provides a historical perspective on how pandemics have been addressed in the past for future research. The declaration was supported by heritage organisations such as the International Council on Archives. This quantitative study used The *UNESCO 2015 Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form* to investigate how members of the South African Society of Archivists responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of preserving and providing access to documentary heritage. A structured web questionnaire was used to collect data. The study revealed that while some archives and records management practitioners' institutions had preservation, access, and disaster preparedness measures in place, others did not. From the findings, policy directions and a framework for records and archives management are proposed.

Keywords: access; archives management; COVID-19; digitisation; documentary heritage; preservation; records management; South African Society of Archivists; South Africa

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Introduction

The role of archives and records management practitioners, as well as institutions, is to collect, preserve, and provide access to documentary heritage. Documentary heritage, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 2015), includes documents "of significant and enduring value to a community, a culture, a country, or to humanity in general, and whose deterioration or loss would be a harmful impoverishment." A pandemic is akin to a serial killer in that it has devastating effects on humans and the economy, such as the 1918 Spanish flu (Padhan and Prabheesh 2021, 220), Ebola, and HIV (GLOPID-R 2021). Documenting the effects of a pandemic is critical for future research and combating similar outbreaks (Jones et al. 2021). Pandemic records, such as COVID-19, are therefore extremely valuable because they provide evidence-based best practices, lessons, and information on pandemic management for future research.

Cases of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) were first reported in Wuhan in China's Hubei province in December 2019 (Enria et al. 2021). SARS-CoV-2 rapidly spread across China and in many other countries. On 30 January 2020, WHO declared the Chinese SARS-CoV-2 to be a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern." On 11 February 2020, WHO announced a new name for the epidemic disease caused by 2019-nCoV as coronavirus disease, known as COVID-19 (Lai et al. 2020). In South Africa, the first COVID-19 case was announced on 5 March 2020 (National Institute for Communicable Diseases [NICD] 2020). On 24 March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a national state of disaster in South Africa in terms of the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Republic of South Africa 2002). A national lockdown, based on a risk-adjusted approach five-level COVID-19 alert system, was announced on 26 March 2020 (Republic of South Africa 2020), as presented in table 1.

Table 1: Alert level system for COVID-19 in South Africa

Alert level 1	Alert level 2	Alert level 3	Alert level 4	Alert level 5
Most normal activity can resume with precautions and health guidelines followed at all times. The population is prepared for an increase in alert levels if necessary.	Physical distancing and restrictions on leisure and social activities to prevent a resurgence of the virus.	Restriction on many activities, including workplaces and social activities, to address a high risk of transmission.	Extreme precautions to limit community transmission and outbreaks while allowing some activity to resume.	Drastic measures are implemented to contain the spread of the virus and save lives.

The alert levels were to determine the level of restrictions to be applied during the national state of disaster in South Africa. Alert level 1 indicates a low COVID-19 spread with a high health system readiness. Hence, most normal activities are allowed. Alert level 2 indicates a moderate COVID-19 spread with a high health system readiness. Alert level 3 indicates a moderate COVID-19 spread with a moderate health system readiness. Alert level 4 indicates a moderate to a high COVID-19 spread with a low to moderate health system readiness. Alert level 5 indicates a high COVID-19 spread with a low health system readiness; hence, most activities are restricted (Republic of South Africa 2020). To date, South Africa is still under a national lockdown, and alert levels have been adjusted according to risks. This study was conducted during the 2020/21 national lockdown and not at a specific alert level.

Documenting COVID-19

In response to the widespread epidemic, governments worldwide have made decisions and introduced a wide range of control measures, varying in stringency and timing of implementation. Padhan and Prabheesh (2021), for instance, reviewed literature regarding the economic effects on several countries. In addition, communities have experienced the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic, and some have recorded their day-to-day activities during the period (Deyrup and Ponichtera 2020; Dixon 2020). UNESCO (2020) notes that "memory institutions, including national archives, libraries, museums, as well as educational and research bodies, are already recording the decisions, and actions are made which will help future generations to understand the extent of the pandemic and its impact on societies." Documenting and preserving COVID-19 information, thus, presents an opportunity to preserve a rich and diverse historical record for the future (Jones et al. 2021). However, COVID-19 information has been difficult to track and record because of the rapid and transient nature of related events and issues (Jones et al. 2021). In support, Hemsath (2021) observes that because disease outbreaks are unpredictable, opportunities for documentation are short and hurried. Nonetheless, Dixon (2020) and Hemsath (2021) advocate for efforts to document COVID-19 decisions to be made as soon as possible because immediate documentation of the pandemic provides an honest record as events are documented while they are happening, rather than when retold years later.

UNESCO (2020) issued a declaration emphasising the importance of preserving COVID-19 records for future evidence of how governments, citizens, and the international community handled the pandemic. Additionally, the UNESCO (2020) declaration calls for shared responsibility by memory institutions in preserving COVID-19 records and pledges to support all member states in preserving official records related to COVID-19 within the framework of the *UNESCO 2015 Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form*. The recommendation is built on three pillars: identification, preservation, and access to documentary heritage; applicable policy measures; and national and international cooperation. South Africa has been a member of UNESCO since 1994. (UNESCO 2021). In this context, the South African Society of Archivists (SASA) used

the UNESCO 2015 declaration as a conceptual framework to conduct a survey among its members to determine how they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in preserving and providing access to documentary heritage in order to suggest policy directions concerning project prioritisation for preservation and access records.

The South African Society of Archivists

SASA is a professional body established in 1959 with the main objective of the "furtherance of Archival Science in general and particularly in South Africa" (SASA 2021). Members include practitioners in archives and records management, as well as institutions and academics. Membership, however, is not automatic and must be renewed annually. As a result, membership numbers fluctuate from year to year. SASA is led by a National Executive Committee (NEC) that is elected triennially (SASA 2021). SASA is a forum that upholds professionalism by sharing professional expertise and research findings through conferences, workshops, and its annual journal. Given its mandate of advancing the archival profession, the NEC agreed at one of its quarterly meetings in 2020 that SASA should respond to the call to preserve and provide access to COVID-19 documentary heritage by determining the role of its members. According to Booms, Joldersma, and Klumpenhouwer (1987, 76), documentary heritage is "evidence of historical activity or all the surviving documentation on past events." Thus, archivists play a significant role in the formation of documentary heritage because they determine what is valuable to future generations through processes. The SASA NEC tasked the authors of this article, both of whom are NEC members, with conducting a study among registered members during the 2020/21 financial year, from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study that directed this article was to investigate how SASA members who were archives and records management practitioners responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by preserving and providing access to documentary heritage. This was intended to understand the levels of service and support provided since the beginning of the national lockdown in South Africa on 26 March 2020. The study objectives were developed in response to the *UNESCO 2015 Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form*. The objectives were to:

a) Determine how COVID-19 records were identified for preservation.
b) Identify available preservation measures for COVID-19 records.
c) Establish how records were accessed during the COVID-19 lockdown.
d) Determine the existence of policies for preservation and access to documentary heritage.

Literature Review

The literature review below is discussed according to the study objectives.

Identification of COVID-19 Records as Documentary Heritage

For records to be preserved, they must first be identified. The identification of records occurs before a record is created, opines (Kastenhofer 2016). The enduring value or historical significance of a record is thus identified prior to the records management processes of creation, capture, storage, and access. To avoid random storage of any record and non-records, record creators must be made aware of what to identify before records are created. File plan, retention, and disposal schedules are used to identify records before, at, or near the time of their creation (Dollar 2016, 4). In April 2020, the Washington State Archives (2021) and the New York State Archives (2021) issued guidance to state and local government agencies on COVID-19 record retention requirements. Pre-empting such activities, Booms et al. (1987, 78) assert that the importance of historical facts in solving modern problems is irrefutable, and thus such facts must be identified and stored for future use. Dixon (2020) agrees, emphasising the importance of identifying the historical significance of records early on rather than when experiences are retold as oral history years later. However, Lyall (1993, 69) contends that decisions about their retention and preservation as documentary heritage of national significance cannot be made until a sound definition of national significance is agreed upon, and effective procedures for identifying and assessing their significance are developed. According to Dixon (2020), memory institutions should not rest on their laurels but rather be proactive in identifying documentary heritage to prevent its loss. According to UNESCO (2015), memory institutions, in collaboration with civil society, should develop policies for selection, collection, and preservation that are guided by international standards for documentary heritage preservation and accessibility. Documentary heritage, however, is not just a governmental matter but also a societal one. According to Booms et al. (1987), documentary heritage is a cultural representation of society. As a result, the day-to-day experiences of individuals and communities during the pandemic must be documented and preserved to address the pandemic's socioeconomic impact, inequities during pandemics, and to have a record that is representative of all members of communities (Jones et al. 2021, 546).

UNESCO (2015) recommends that memory institutions should identify specific documentary heritage that is at risk of being lost or damaged and develop collection and preservation strategies. Hemsath (2021) describes how the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) developed a phased identification and collection strategy to avoid the loss of their COVID-19 records. In February 2020, the UNMC and its hospital partner, Nebraska Medicine, monitored and treated COVID-19 patients, including evacuees from Wuhan, China. As the first phase of the collection strategy, the University Special Collections Library and Archives (SCA) identified digital material such as social media articles, news articles, official university or hospital statements, media footage, videos, personal papers, oral histories, administrative documents, artefacts, and images. Apart from university records, the SCA, in partnership with history institutions, identified and collected community experiences through an online submission form (Hemsath 2021, 116). Dixon (2020) claims that the Internet has enabled people from geographically disparate communities to contribute identified

digital content. However, as Jones et al. (2021) point out, digital COVID-19 records exacerbate social inequalities. The authors express concern about inequalities and challenges in collecting and preserving digital records as a result of budgets not being prioritised for digitisation projects for storage and access, as well as a shortage of staff with digitisation skills. Training and capacity-building schemes must be developed in accordance with UNESCO recommendations.

Preservation of COVID-19 Records

Preservation refers to activities of managing and maintenance of records, archival and library materials, including storage, treatment and prevention of decay, loss and damage (Sawant 2014). Preservation thus involves strategies, processes, tools, and technologies for safeguarding records for future access. Pandemic records may be identified and collected; however, strategies on how they will be preserved for access must be in place. In a joint statement, the Working Group on Archives and Human Rights of the Latin American Archives Association and the Archives and Human Rights Section of the International Council on Archives (2020) affirmed that archives and records management are essential services during the pandemic since they are responsible for the preservation and maintenance of the pandemic records. However, scholarly literature on the preservation of COVID-19 records by archives and records management professionals is sparse. Netshakhuma (2020), in a study conducted among members of the International Council on Archives Section on University and Research Institutions Archives, revealed that a limited number of institutions had strategies for the preservation of COVID-19 records. The literature reviewed for the current study, however, revealed several university special collections libraries and archives to have made inroads with preservation activities. Gorton (2020) describes that the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists—through collaboration with other information management professionals, such as Australasia Preserves, a digital preservation community of practice for Australia, New Zealand and Australasian region—successfully collected and preserved historical COVID-19 tweets. Deyrup and Ponichtera (2020) detail how the Seton Hall Catholic University in New Jersey developed a digital oral history archive through crowdsourcing of COVID-19 pandemic community experiences in 2020. Preservica is the university library's digital preservation system for archiving recordings from the local and university communities. Jones et al. (2021, 551) commend university libraries in Canada for initiating the collection and preservation of COVID-19 records, such as the Archives and Special Collections of Brock University Library, the University Archives and Special Collections of the University of Saskatchewan, and the Archives and Special Collections of the University of Ottawa Library.

Aside from scholarly literature, a few guidelines from universities and memory institutions were discovered. Dixon (2020), for example, describes how Arizona State University developed a digital crowd-sourcing archive known as "A Journal of the Plague Year: An Archive of COVID-19" by leveraging best practices and lessons learnt from real-time archives of major crises, such as the Brown University Library's

Hurricane Katrina Archive (2021). The National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (2020) issued recommendations to governmental bodies on the handling of paper records during the pandemic. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Canadian Conservation Institute (Government of Canada 2020) issued guidelines on the care of heritage collections. The recommendations include how to avoid contamination of heritage materials; disinfection of collection spaces; closure of institutions due to COVID-19 cases; and safe reopening.

Access to Records during the COVID-19 Pandemic

UNESCO (2015) encourages member states to promote documentary heritage by publicising relevant web domains and conducting outreach activities; to facilitate inclusive access by enabling open access by all interested parties; and to digitise content for availability and use. Some archives and records management (ARM) institutions have made efforts in identification, collection, and preservation, as discussed in previous sections of this paper. However, access to records has been difficult during the COVID-19 due to a variety of factors. Since most non-essential workplaces, such as archives and libraries, were closed due to the lockdown, patrons were unable to physically access records (Bradley-Sanders 2021). The global COVID-19 lockdown has pushed work and social activities into the digital environment. The abrupt change has exacerbated social inequalities and ARM institutions' capacity to preserve and provide access to records, such as a lack of preparedness in providing digital finding aids, laptops or computers for staff to assist users where possible, and a lack of digitised records (Bradley-Sanders 2021; Jones et al. 2021). Access to records during the pandemic is technologically driven, but funding for archives and records management activities, particularly digitisation projects to enable remote access to records, remains a challenge (Jones et al. 2021). As a result, records management has been negatively impacted by the pandemic (Bradley-Sanders 2021).

Policy Measures for Preservation and Access to Documentary Heritage during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Considering the risk of losing documentary heritage during disasters such as wars, government instability, looting, and pandemics, UNESCO in 1992 established the Memory of the World (MoW) Programme (UNESCO 2021). The Global Policy Forum, one of the MoW programme's activities, focuses on policy advocacy for the preservation and access to documentary heritage among member states. In South Africa, the Disaster Management Act, 2002 (Republic of South Africa 2002, 63), among other Acts and policies, recognises the importance of access to reliable information about a disaster and thus encourages the development and use of information management and communication systems for storage, dissemination, and information exchange. According to the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA 2020), memory institutions are providing online access to information resources to provide remote access during the COVID-19 pandemic, but only where copyright laws permit. As a result, IFLA wrote a letter co-signed by memory institutions and

individuals, including the International Council on Archives, requesting that the World Intellectual Property Organisation allows rather than limits access to intellectual property-governed information resources during the pandemic. Given the challenges experienced by archival institutions in Canada during the pandemic, Jones et al. (2021) propose new preservation and access policy directions, namely strengthening available resources and infrastructure in the archival sector for the preservation of the COVID-19 records; improving resources for digital records preservation; and adherence to ethical procedures in the preservation of research.

Methodology

An electronic structured Google Forms questionnaire was sent by e-mail from the application to 30 members who were archives and records management practitioners as part of this multi-method research approach. The questionnaire included both close-ended and open-ended questions to augment or clarify statistical data. Lecturing staff of academic institutions were excluded from the study. Purposive sampling, according to Tongco (2007, 153), can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research and renders the study valid if the sample is representative of the population under study. A total of 12 responses were received, accounting for 40% of SASA members who were ARM practitioners during the year under study. The authors were satisfied that the responses represented the population despite the lockdown and its challenges in terms of member accessibility. The responses were collected using Google Forms, which automatically analyses the data and presents it in charts, graphs, and on a Google spreadsheet. The Google spreadsheet provided added functionality since it gave in-depth data for further analysis of some responses. The authors were able to present the information in tabular form using the spreadsheet's additional analysis functionality, as shown in table 2 of this study. Furthermore, the Google spreadsheet generated charts and graphs to present the analysed data. The SASA NEC granted permission to conduct the study. Data were collected from individual SASA members and those representing member institutions. The questionnaire explained the purpose of the survey, and participation was entirely voluntary. SASA membership was low in the 2020/21 financial year due to the COVID-19 lockdown, and some members did not have access to their official emails.

Results

The results were analysed based on the response rate as well as responses to the study objectives.

Demographics

To determine the demographics of the participants, only a few questions were asked. Figure 1 from the study shows that 66.7% (8) of the participants were from the public sector, 25% (3) from the private sector, and 8.3% (1) from a public university archives and records management.

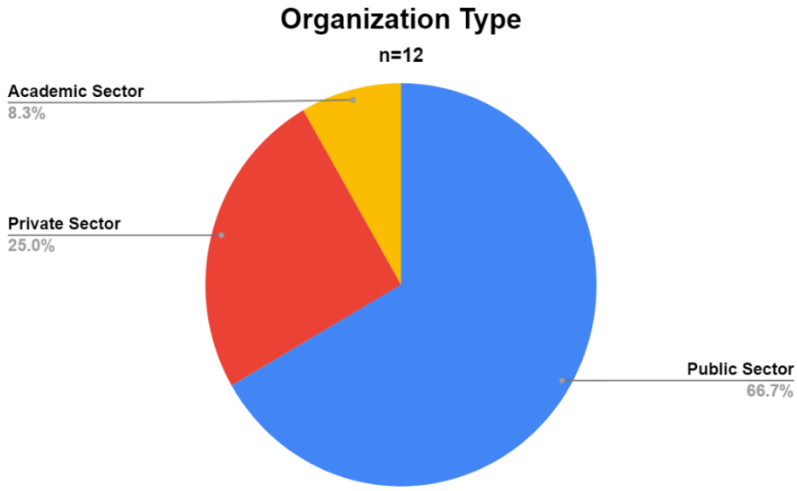

Figure 1: Participants' demographics (N=12)

Of the 12 participants, 8 (66.7%) worked in records management/registry, 6 (50%) in archives/records management, and 1 (8.3%) in a special collections library. Figure 2 summarises the participants' job responsibilities. Despite the fact that registry clerk/administrative officer/assistant was one of the options on the questionnaire, none of the participants selected this option. According to the report in figure 2, 25% (3) of the participants held supervisory positions, 58.3% (7) held managerial positions, and 16.7 % (2) were archivists.

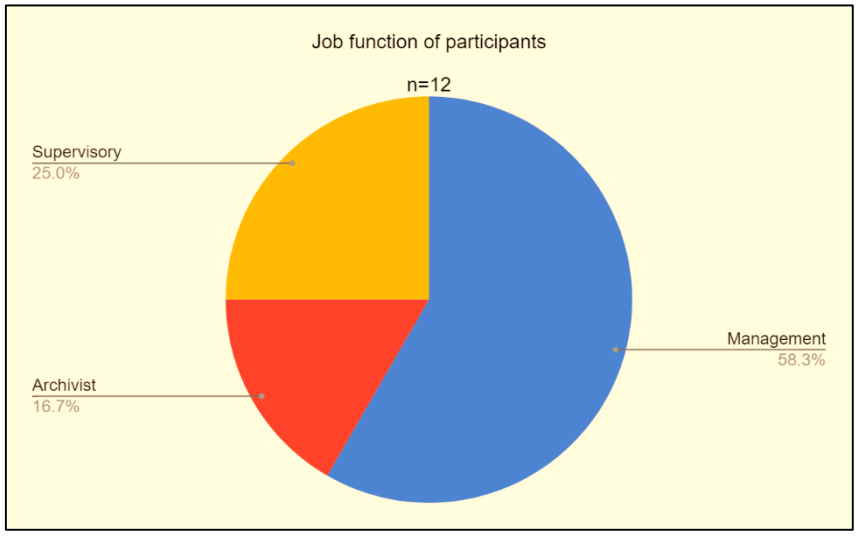

Figure 2: Participants per job positions (N=12)

Responses to the Objectives

Identification of COVID-19 Records as Documentary Heritage

According to the literature review, identification of records should be done through the file plan, retention, and disposal schedules prior to, at, or near the time of their creation. As a result, participants were asked if their institutions had any recorded decisions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The question was dichotomous: yes or no. Participants who answered yes were 91.7% (11), and those who answered no were 8.3% (1). Participants were asked if their institutional file plans accommodated global and national pandemics, disaster and emergency records such as COVID-19. A total of 50% of participants agreed that their file plan accommodated such records, while the other 50% stated that it did not.

Preservation of COVID-19 Records

The literature review uncovered that archives and records management are essential services during the pandemic, since they are responsible for the preservation and maintenance of the pandemic records (Bradley-Sanders 2021). Participants were requested to indicate whether they strongly agreed, agreed or disagreed with the statement. A total of 85% of the participants strongly agreed, 15% agreed, and none disagreed. Moreover, 67% (8) of the 12 participants believed they ensured proper management and preservation of COVID-19-related records, while 33% (4) did not. In addition, participants were required to respond to a question by selecting all applicable statements to demonstrate the preservation processes they had put in place in preparation for post-lockdown as per government regulations. Table 2 presents the responses.

Table 2: Preservation of COVID-19 records (N=12)

Post-lockdown process	**Responses**	
	Number	**%**
Personal protective equipment for archives/records management staff	10	83%
Social distancing	10	83%
Physical access to records	9	75%
Sanitisation of spaces/equipment/materials	10	83%
Quarantining of returned materials	7	58%
Sanitisation stations for clients	9	75%
None of the above	0	0%

To further determine preservation processes in place, participants were asked if they had business continuity plans, and they had to choose one of three options: yes, no, or not sure. Figure 3 shows that a total of 50% (5) yes; 40% (5) no; and 10% (2) not sure responses were received.

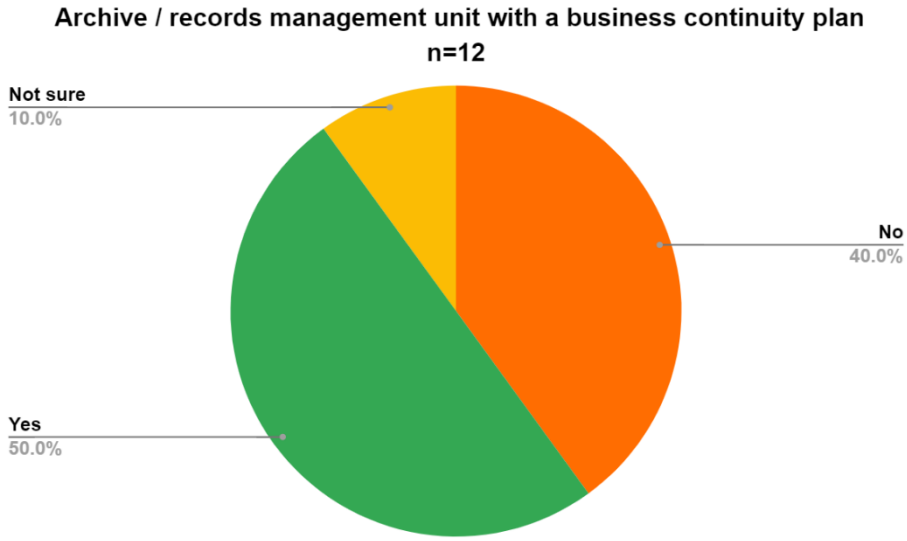

Figure 3: Archives and records management units with a business continuity plan (N=12)

As stated above, the majority of participants indicated that COVID-19 decisions were recorded. One of the study's questions required respondents to select a response that indicated where the records were stored. Participants were required to select all applicable responses from a list. As a result, 16.7% (2) of participants indicated that COVID-19-related records were kept in the office of the head of the institution, while 33.3% (4) of participants indicated that the records were kept in both the Registry and the Enterprise Content Management system (ECM). Also, 16.7% (2) indicated that the records were stored in the registry, 16.7% (2) selected ECM as the storage mode, and 16.7% (2) participants were not sure. The report is depicted in figure 4:

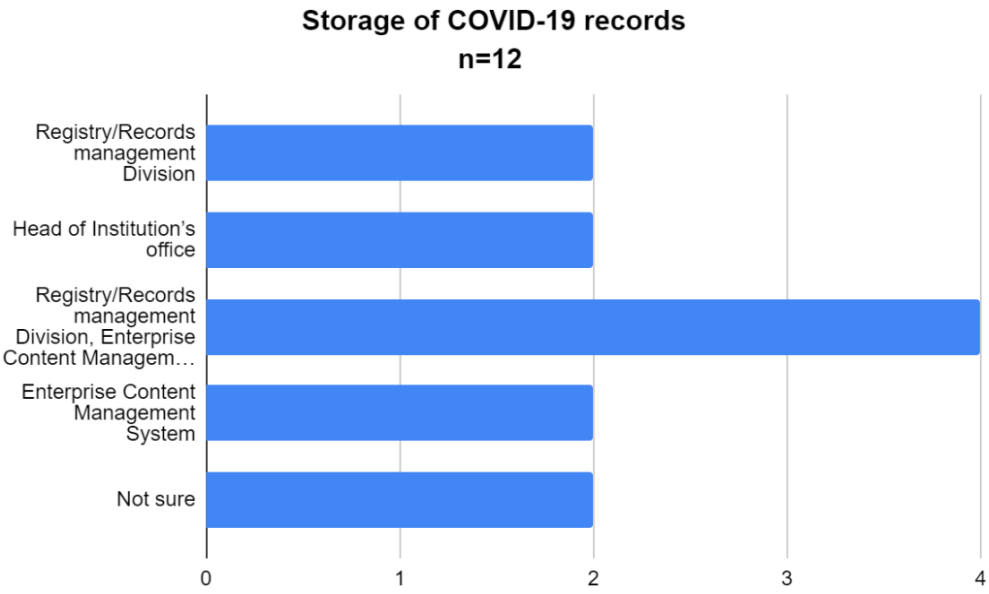

Figure 4: Storage of COVID-19 records (N=12)

Access to Records during the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown

Respondents were asked if they provided a full virtual service during the lockdown and were given a yes or no answer. A total of 67% (8) of respondents selected the no option, while 33% (4) selected the yes option. In addition, respondents were asked whether they provided online access to digital records to staff at their respective institutions (yes or no). A total of 75% (9) yes and 25% (3) no responses were received. The respondents were asked a question about whether they provided online access to archival material to the public, and 67% (8) yes and 33% (4) no responses were received. In addition, the respondents were asked to select an applicable response, such as yes, no, I'm not sure, to indicate whether their institutions had security measures in place to protect information online. The report shows that 80% (9) participants provided yes responses; 10% (2) participants were not sure, and one (10%) did not know. Participants were asked whether they provided access to information to the public, according to the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) during the lockdown. Of the 12 participants, 83.3% (10) indicated that they had been provided access to information according to the PAIA, while 16.7% (2) did not.

Policy Measures for Preservation and Access to Documentary Heritage during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The participants were asked to select an applicable yes or no response to indicate whether their archive or records management policies made provision for the security of records online. A total of 85% (10) of the respondents selected yes, and 17% (2) selected no. In addition, the participants were asked a question about whether their

archives/records management policy includes disaster recovery and/or business continuity. The results revealed 66.7% (6) yes; 22.2% (5) no; and 11.1% (1) not sure responses, as presented in figure 5.

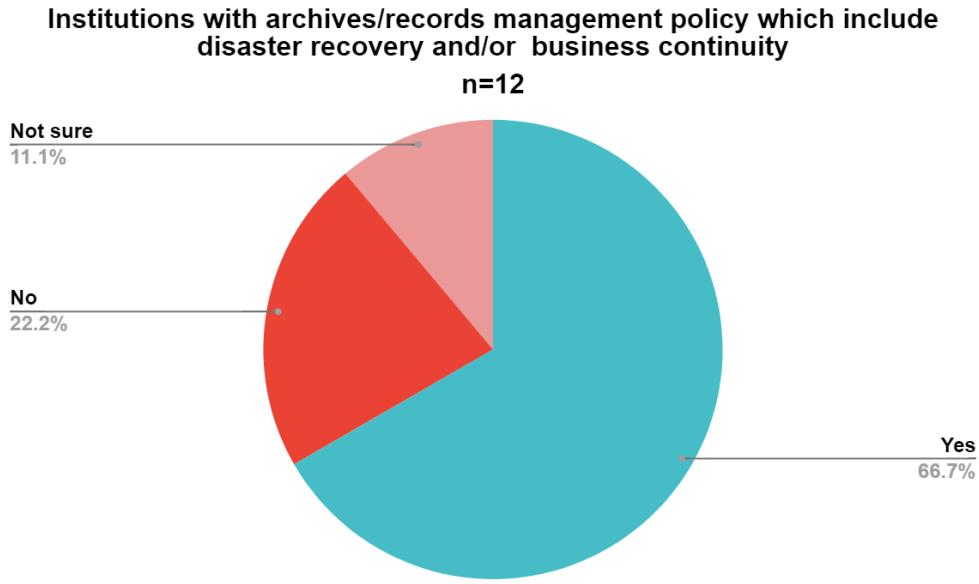

Figure 5: Institutions with archives and records management policy covering disaster recovery and business continuity (N=12)

Discussion

The literature review revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic was a historical event worth recording and preserving to help in dealing with similar pandemics, should they occur in the future. This study used four of the *UNESCO 2015 Recommendations Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form* as a framework. Dollar (2016, 34) reveals that records should be identified through file plans, retention and disposal schedules before, during or near the time of their creation to avoid loss or unnecessary retention of records. Momoti (2017, 63), as well as Ngoepe and Van der Walt (2009), explains that a file plan provides instructions on how records should be managed to ensure their proper filing and access as well as retention periods (Henttonen and Kettunen 2011, 87). The current study revealed that COVID-19 decisions were documented, and records included in file plans of SASA member institutions. The records were stored in ECM systems and registries. A matter of concern, however, was that in some institutions, COVID-19 records were kept in the office of the head of the institution. This negatively impacts the accessibility of such important records to other staff. Nonetheless, the fact that some records were stored in ECM systems shows that there is a move towards records and archives preservation and access in the digital environment.

In accordance with the literature review, the study revealed a consensus among practitioners that ARM is an essential service due to its role in preserving and providing access to documentary heritage of global importance. Despite being excluded from essential services during the lockdown, SASA member institutions continued to provide remote access to records electronically for business continuity. Momoti (2021) and Ngoepe (2008, 45) assert that records are sources of evidence used for decision-making and good governance; therefore, they should be accessible. In addition to providing access to records, member institutions had policies, business continuity plans as well as security measures in place for the preservation of records, including post-lockdown readiness.

Recommendations and Proposed Framework

Since archives and records management seem to be key essential services during any disaster, including the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown to curb the spread of the virus, it is a requirement that the services remain accessible. It is highly recommended that information about the pandemic and many other heritage matters always remain accessible to the citizens through appropriate measures, as stipulated by government regulations. This is because failure to provide access results in anxiety and panic due to a lack of information. Archives and records centres serve as information hubs for documentary heritage and topical information. This is even more relevant for archival institutions since the provision of the latest information can also be used as a pull factor for the public to become aware of historical information contained in archival materials. It is vital, therefore, that the South African government acknowledges archival institutions and records centres as essential services during the pandemic lockdown. Moreover, to assist in quelling the pandemic and continuing to render information services to staff, decision-makers should prioritise automating information management processes and digitising their collections.

The proposed framework was developed based on literature as well as findings from archives and records management practitioners. As presented in figure 6, the framework demonstrates that to provide archives and records management services during the pandemic lockdown, physical records, that is, paper-based and analogue materials such as cassettes, compact discs, VCRs, DVDs, microfiche, and microfilm, must be digitised. The digitisation processes may be costly, but organisations must weigh the advantages and disadvantages. Most materials, particularly COVID-19-related materials, are created in electronic format in the current fourth industrial era, and as such, institutions should preserve them directly in their original format. Since records must be backed up, organisations may choose to use both local servers and cloud storage for access and business continuity. Of course, all processes would be governed by relevant legislation, policies, and procedures, as well as the COVID-19 regulatory framework. By ensuring digital access to relevant information, institutions would be in a better position to control COVID-19 infections among staff and clients. Furthermore, as long as COVID-19

regulations are observed, staff will be able to provide preservation services at their institutions.

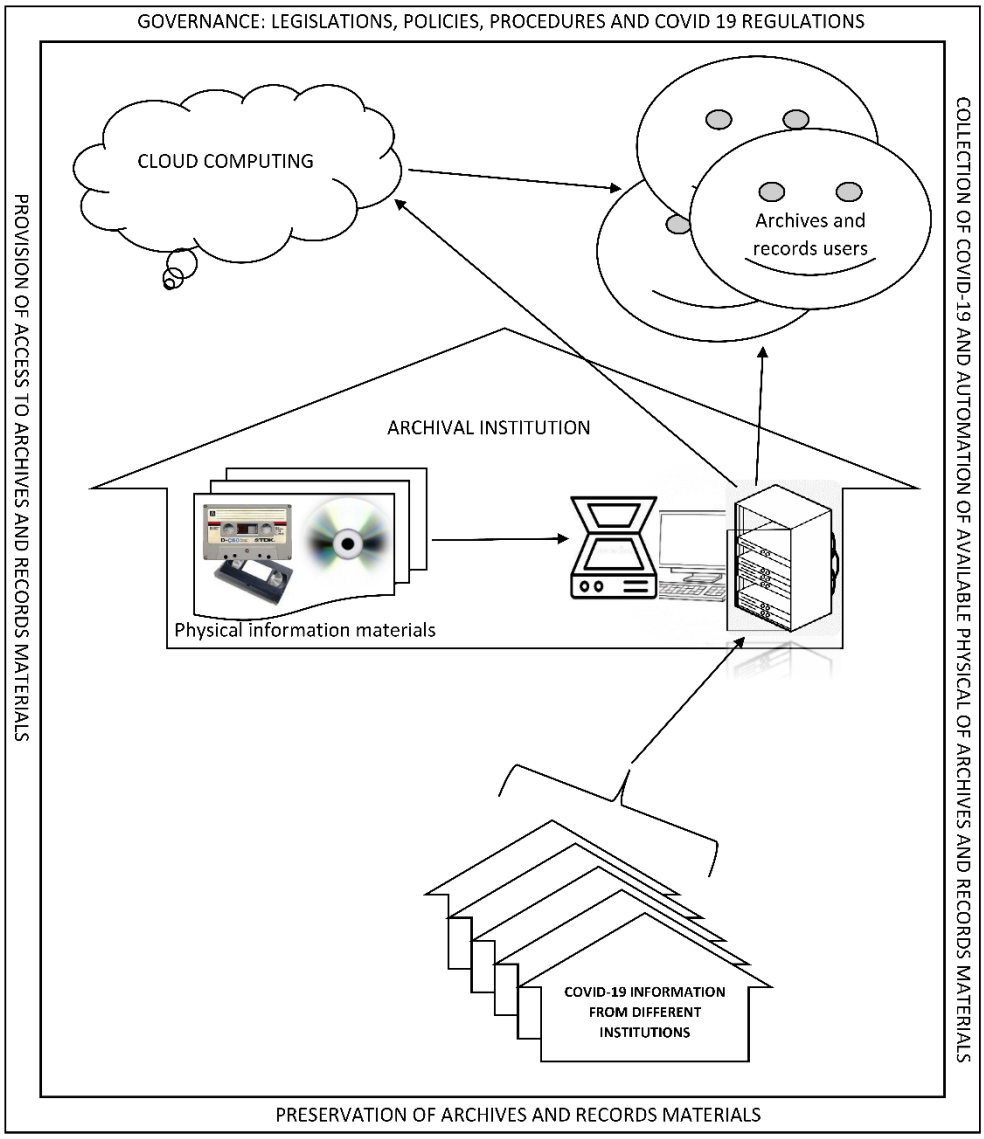

Figure 6: Framework for management of archives and records during the pandemic lockdown

It is hoped that this framework will serve as a benchmark for policy and decision-makers in the archives and records management industry. Since archives and records management practitioners have been controlling the past, they should be in a better

position to control the future. Hence, the title of the study is "Whoever controls the past controls the future …"

Conclusion

COVID-19 is a global pandemic of historic magnitude, and relevant information sources should be preserved for future generations.

The purpose of this study was to determine how SASA members responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in preserving and providing access to documentary heritage during South Africa's national lockdown. Even though the study's population was small due to the accessibility of SASA members, the study revealed that COVID-19 was documented, records were preserved, and the majority of member institutions provided digital access to records. Due to the importance of information during disasters, emergencies, and pandemics, this study recommends that memory institutions in South Africa be considered an essential service for business continuity. Furthermore, ARM digitisation projects should be prioritised and adequately resourced to ensure the preservation and access to documentary heritage.

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