

Reel Chaos

ARE TEENS TURNING VIOLENCE INTO CONTENT?

PHOTO GENERATED BY GOOGLE BANANA/
PROMPT BY HUMPHREY WAMPULA

BY VIOLA NIWAHA

It starts like any other Mbale afternoon. Dust rising lazily off Nabuyonga Rise. Students in uniform drifting home in clusters, laughter bouncing between them like a shared secret. Then, in a blink, the mood shifts. A boy is surrounded. Voices sharpen. Hands grab. And before anyone thinks to stop it, phones are already in the air, steady, focused, recording.

On April 14, 2026, Siraj Buyinza, a Senior Four student, was walking home when six fellow students closed in on him. A knife flashed. Punches to the

face. Kicks to the back. His phone disappeared. His cash followed. Somewhere nearby, someone decided this was not just a robbery. It was content. Within hours, the video was trending on *TikTok* and circulating through *WhatsApp* groups, jumping from phone to phone like gossip that had found a body. Strangers watched. Some gasped. Others laughed. A few pressed share. The footage helped police track down the suspects. But it also did something more disturbing. It turned Siraj's fear into entertainment.

Mbale had seen this story

before. Just nine months earlier, on July 28, 2025, Shafik Wasike, also a Senior Four student, stepped out briefly after school to pick up a bag. He never made it back. Attacked from behind by a group of students from different schools, he was stabbed with a screwdriver and later pronounced dead at Mbale Regional Referral Hospital. There was no viral video this time. No trending clip. Just silence. And a family left with questions that no comment section can ever answer.

Two boys. One city. One pattern that refuses to stay hidden. Violence is no

longer just happening. It is being staged, captured, and shared. The phone has become part of the crime scene.

A Youth Crime Report released in November 2025 by Uganda Youth Development Link and UNODC tells a story that is hard to ignore. Theft cases among youth peaked at 35,742 in 2023. Narcotics cases surged by 154 percent over the same period. Young people aged 18 to 35 now make up 75 percent of Uganda's prison population. The numbers are not just statistics. They are signals. Something is shifting.

When a fight becomes a show.

There was a time when a school fight drew a crowd for one reason only. Curiosity. Someone would shout. Someone would run to call a teacher. The goal was to stop it before it got worse. Today, the instinct has changed. The first reaction is often not to intervene. It is to record.

For some teenagers, conflict has quietly transformed into performance. A fight is no longer just about anger or disagreement. It is a stage. The audience is online. The reward is attention.

>> CONTINUED ON PAGE 24.

Winning is optional. Going viral is the real prize.

But every viral clip hides a deeper cost. Behind the shaky footage is a real person, bruised not just in body but in dignity. What lasts a few seconds on screen can linger for years in someone's mind.

Nimusiima Elite, a teacher at Makobore High School Kinyasano, sees the ripple effects clearly. When such videos spread, they do not just expose the individuals involved. They drag entire schools and families into the spotlight. Shame travels fast. Faster than truth. Faster than context.