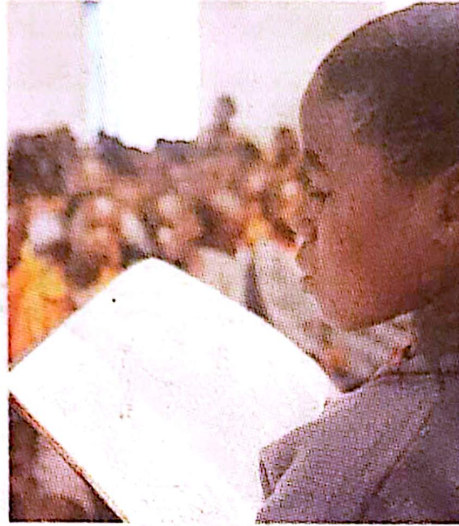


Checking mental health is vital

As a mental health practitioner, I always spare time to visit Butabika Mental Health Hospital each time I visit Uganda. However, what worries me is that many people are being admitted on a daily basis. Yet without enough attention paid to mental health crisis, economic development is slowed. How can we stop surging admissions in mental health institutions? Would early intervention, especially targeting young children, help? Available research shows that half of adult mental health conditions develop before the age of 14. If we invested more in children mental health services starting with spotting early signs and dealing with them, would that stop future mental health problems of our people?

A recent study in the United Kingdom found that three children in every classroom have a diagnosable mental disorder with a massive 90 per cent of school head teachers reporting an increase in mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. The problem is so bad that prime minister Theresa May pledged to tackle stigma attached to mental health among young people with additional specialist training for at least one teacher in every school.

Have you asked what happens to your child at school? There is a



school general nurse who calls you whenever your child is sick, but how about the child's mental health needs? Ever seen any school report raising any concerns about your child's sleep, eating, anger. How many head teachers or teachers in the country have had some kind of mental health training even if it was a one-week awareness just highlighting what mental health is and what the early warning signs of mental illness are and how a child can be referred for help?

Did you know that a child reading a lot and concentrating could be a sign of mental illness? Well you hear stories of parents praising their children "my child studies a lot he doesn't play from school he sits and reads his books. Could that

be untreated obsessive compulsive disorder? Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) can have its sufferer being fixated on something from cleanliness to reading a lot. Here the sufferer is fixated on academic achievement. Does it ring bells to anyone reading this?

With development and the changing society, our children have too much pressure. In Uganda, we as a nation expect a lot from them. They are dealing with exam stress, body image and cyber bullying drugs, domestic violence. Social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.

As a parent, you could look out for the following signs: Excessive anger, over or under eating, poor sleep pattern, personal hygiene neglect, poor results at school, poor memory, paranoia, and unexplained school absence, physical and verbal aggression and so on. Any of these could show that your child could be having a mental challenge.

Home stresses like domestic violence fights or arguments between parents should be avoided in the presence of children. Besides, consumption of drugs and alcohol before children and neglecting to provide them with necessities can lead to low self-esteem and stress,

Moses Kimuli,
mulimo45@yahoo.com