

A simple background check could save your home

Domestic staff are not just a convenience; they are professional partners who must be properly vetted.

BY PROMISE TWINAMUKYE

The tragic murder of Uganda Christian University's Dean of Students, Pamela Tumwebaze, by her domestic worker has shockingly exposed the severe vulnerabilities that can exist within households. The tragedy has forced the long overdue and difficult conversation about the urgent need for better oversight when recruiting domestic staff.

When hiring domestic staff, many families often rely on friends and relatives to recommend someone. That means blindly trusting what they tell you. Within days, a stranger is living under the same roof, caring for children, handling food items, and accessing private spaces. But according to security experts, this casual approach could be exposing families to serious risks.

Asan Kasingye, AIGP (rtd), managing director of Tayari Security Company, warns that many Ugandans underestimate the importance of personal and household security, which is especially more crucial in urban settings. Kasingye says this is due to lack of awareness.

"These things are not talked about enough. There should be more sensitisation from police and security agencies. A friend recommends someone, and you assume they are trustworthy. But when something goes wrong, that same friend may not take responsibility," he says.

Many employers avoid doing the background checks or hiring formally because it is cheaper. Irene Nabasiye, a manager at an employment agency in Wandegaya, says many clients complain about recruitment fees and would rather risk someone whose background is unknown but comes free of charge.

"When hiring drivers or skilled workers, people do thorough checks. But for domestic workers, they want to save a few shillings, which is a mistake," she says.

Nabasiye says it is risky to rely on word of mouth because people do lie.

"These individuals must undergo background checks because they have unrestricted access to our homes making them potential security liabilities. Some of them may have worked in multiple homes and committed crimes there. They may even have networks with criminals outside. If dismissed, they simply move to another home and continue the same activities," she notes.

What every employer should verify

Kasingye outlines several practical steps that households can take before hiring a domestic worker:

LC1 letter

First, they should have introduction letters



If possible, call and confirm their work history. Ask about their conduct and whether there were any issues. PHOTO: PEXELS.

from their previous areas of residence. As an employer, you should contact the LC1 chairperson to verify the authenticity of that letter.

They should also be registered with the local council of the employer. Take them to the LC1 chairperson so they are recorded in the area register.

Next of kin

You should gather information about their family. If someone says they are from a particular area, ask about their parents, relatives, or someone you can contact. This ensures accountability in case of any issues.

Reference

Ask about their previous employer. If possible, call and confirm their work history. Ask about their conduct and whether there were any issues. This gives you a reference point.

National ID

Ensure they have a national ID. While the law does not allow you to retain it, you can photocopy or scan it for your records. This helps trace their origin if necessary.

Phone number in original names

Additionally, ensure their phone number is registered in their own name. If not, assist them in registering it with telecom providers like MTN or Airtel. This makes it easier to track them if needed.

Photograph

Another overlooked issue is photographs. Many people employ domestic workers but never take their photos. If someone runs away, there is no record. Employers should take and keep photographs for identification purposes.

But security is not only about documents. Kasingye emphasises the importance of understanding a worker's mental and physical health.

"Instead of asking questions directly, you can take them for a medical checkup and cover the cost," he advises.

This ensures both the safety of the household and the well-being of the worker.

Shortcomings and role playing

Traditionally, Uganda's local council system played a strong role in monitoring who lived within communities.

"Today, that system is weakening. Local leaders are no longer as focused on community safety as they used to be," Kasingye observes.

At the same time, neighbourhood vigilance has declined. "If your neighbour has someone, it should concern you too. A criminal in one home is a threat to the entire community," he says.

From verifying identities to engaging local leaders, the responsibility lies not just with the police, but with every household because in the end, the greatest risks are often the ones invited in without question.