

**Abuse.** Eleven out of every 125 youth in casual or informal employment use or have ever used injectable and non-injectable illegal/narcotic drugs, according to the research findings.

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# Kampala, Mbale top in drug abuse-report

**KAMPALA.** A survey conducted by Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN), a youth-led organisation fighting drug abuse, shows that Kampala and Mbale have the highest number of drugs abusers in the country.

For instance, out of 425 respondents in Kampala, 17 per cent used injectable drugs such as heroin.

UHRN's conducted its survey in January to March, this year, and found that one in every 10 city dweller uses or has used non-injectable drugs such as khat, cannabis, and cocaine.

The Kampala City suburbs of Kabalagala, Kisenyi, Bwaise, Kasokoso, Namuwongo, Bakuli, Bwaise, Ndeeba and Kawempe were identified as the hotspots for drug business.

Ms Ruth Nalwanga has vended khat or *mairungi* in a corridor at Kisenyi Bus terminal for seven years and she says police have arrested her 10 times. Still, she persists with her 5pm to midnight business.

The 27-year-old claims her boyfriend introduced her to the drug trade and the earnings have helped her educate their three children abandoned by their father.

Taxi drivers and touts, commercial sex workers, security personnel, boda bodas and upcoming boxers are her main customers.

"When you chew *mairungi*, you feel warm. That is why many people buy *mairungi* during a cold weather," she said.

Mr Tinka Zarugaba, a police commissioner in-charge of anti-narcotics unit, says cannabis and khat are the most abused drugs in urban centres.

Butambala, Mpigi, Kabarole and Arua lead in growing of khat while cannabis is produced mainly in Mbale, Busia, Namayingo, Mayuge and Tororo districts.

A January to March 2017



**Dangerous.** An addict puffs smoke from a cigarette. A survey shows that Kampala and Mbale districts have the highest number of drugs abusers in the country. FILE PHOTO

study by UHRN names Mbale as the second largest drug town after the capital Kampala. Eleven out of every 125 youths in casual or informal employment use or have ever used injectable and non-injectable drugs, according to the research findings.

Police's Zarugaba said drug abuse is high in Kampala and Mbale because "drugs are plenty and cheap".

"Drugs are a major [contributing] factor to criminality in Kampala. We arrest on average five (drug abusers) every night," said Mr Frank Mwesigwa, the Kampala Metropolitan police commander.

Police registered 1,300 such cases from January to June, this year, and arrested 2,163 Nigerian, South African, Kenyan and Ugandan traffickers in 2016.

Police classify drugs into two categories: depressants and stimulants that cause excitement to consumers.

"Heroin is the main depressant. It is taken to suppress

stress or anxiety. They first make a person aggressive for a few minutes [before] they calm down," commissioner Zarugaba said.

The cheapest portion of cocaine and heroin is sold at Shs5000 while the injectable version of the latter costs Shs10,000. Cannabis is cheaper at Shs2000 per roll.

## Shs72m

PRICE OF A  
KILOGRAMME OF  
COCAINE

Police say cocaine and heroin are smuggled into the country via Entebbe International Airport.

They last year impounded 67kgs of heroin and 6 Kgs of cocaine, Mr Zarugaba said, compared to 15kgs of heroin

and 3kgs of cocaine seized this year.

Mr Christopher Baguma, UHRN's programmes manager, said drug use is a public health problem, not just a criminal justice matter.

"Drug abuse is increasing because victims are handled as criminals instead of guiding them to recover. Police usually arrests, detain and prosecute them instead of helping them to recover from the problem," Mr Baguma stresses.

Most of the juvenile suspects are booked ostensibly for rehabilitation at Butabika hospital and Kampiringisa remand home.

According to the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act (NDPSA) 2016, drug traffickers can be imprisoned for up to 20 years while those found in possession of drugs can be handed a sentence of up to 10 years or payment of a fine of not less than Shs10m