

# Report questions handling of patients in Butabika hospital

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**KAMPALA.** Patients at Butabika National Mental Referral Hospital are being mistreated and subjected to unnecessary use of chemical restraint, a new report has revealed.

Titled: "Breaking point," the report by the Mental Disability Advocacy Centre (MDAC), an international non-governmental organisation paints a bleak picture of the facility the lawmakers once extolled as 'cleanest' in the country.

According to the report, the hospital wards were found to be dirty, overcrowded and lacked basic protections of human dignity such as privacy and personal beddings.

On a number of wards, they found evidence of malnutrition, and many residents had skin conditions, cuts and poor general hygiene.

The report also found that mentally-ill patients are overdosed with drugs even when they are not violent and asked police to open investigations into the allegations of torture and ill-treatment at the facility.

The report insists that ill-treatment of patients at Uganda's only mental specialised hospital is a violation of human rights.

"The condition of the residents on the female 'sick ward' was of serious concern. We were told that some of the residents there had TB yet MDAC team was free to enter and it was not an isolated ward."

#### MDAC REPORT

When the team visited the hospital in May children were found detained with adults, continued solitary confinement in seclusion rooms, and patients with serious health conditions were left untreated.

The report also confirmed shortage of general and specialist health care [and mistreatment of patients]. For instance in one of the wards, women with tuberculosis (TB) were left in the open - motionless, sitting and laying on floors with fresh blood stains.

Ms Felicia Mburu, the MDAC Africa Projects boss told *Saturday Monitor* that the report was based on observations made by a team of MDAC representatives during a visit that was approved by the Ministry of Health.

The visit was intended to assess the general conditions of the hospital and the service delivery chain in a cloistered facility that provides specialised care to people with mental illness. "Butabika fails to provide basic, dignified conditions or treatment," Ms Mburu told journalists during the release of the report.

"Sadly, the situation seems to have declined since MDAC released reports assessing mental health and human rights in Uganda in 2014. Urgent reforms are needed to guar-

antee all Ugandans quality mental healthcare across the country and end the crisis at Butabika," she said.

Without disclosing the number, she said some of the residents who were sent to the facility by courts of law for mental examinations had since been locked behind bars (excluded) and forgotten. "Seclusion needs to stop it's a form of punishment, not treatment," she warned.

She also indicated that a three-year-old child was found in a TB ward yet she was not receiving treatment, adding: "We were told she was being held there after her mother had been admitted to a different ward."

"While, at the time of the visit, the team did not see anyone in physical restraints, other highly coercive practices were observed, including use of seclusion cells, shaving women's heads on both the acute and sick wards, and many residents appeared highly medicated," she said.

The NGO wants government to review and redraft the Mental Health Bill, currently at the committee stage, to bring it into greater compliance with international human rights law.

However, the Ministry of Health on Thursday dismissed the findings of the report as "one sided".

While the hospital director, Dr David Basangwa was not available for comment, Dr Sheila Ndyanabangi, the principal medical officer in charge of Mental Health and Control of Substance Abuse in the ministry of Health, told *Saturday Monitor* that the organisation did not consult the ministry on the findings of their research.

"The Ministry of Health, Butabika Hospital, and Mental Health Uganda were not consulted. I told them not to publish the report and the users have not consented to what they are reporting," Dr Ndyanabangi said.

Ms Mburu claims she was authorised to conduct research, something Dr Ndyanabangi denies. Ms Mburu also told this newspaper that she had received threats from Dr Ndyanabangi, asking her not to release the findings of the disputed report.

"They have no letter from me authorising them to [conduct] research at Butabika Hospital. But they came to my office and told me that they wanted to see the hospital," Dr Ndyanabangi said.

She said the NGO wants to portray that things are bad in Africa with an aim of getting money from their donors. "How can a Kenyan come to Uganda to show that things are bad yet Mathari Mental hospital back home is very worse?" Dr Ndyanabangi wondered.

Dr Basangwa on Friday promised to get back to this newspaper but by press time, calls to him remained unanswered.