

Coping with an addict partner

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Pamela K. Bulya, 40, a therapist at Focus on Recovery Uganda (FORE), is a former addict of pethidine, a drug used to mitigate severe pain. It is administered through an intravenous injection.

Her addiction started in 2008, shortly after being diagnosed with a heart condition. "The drug was used at the hospital for my treatment. After I was discharged that same year, I started craving it," Bulya says.

Since the drug can only be obtained on doctor's prescription, Bulya resorted to getting it from the black market. "Money was never a problem. I did not mind who sold it to me. Someone would tell me a box cost Shs200,000 and I would buy it, hide and inject myself," she says.

After administering the drug, Bulya says she would feel stress free and a sense of great relief. The addiction caused emotional pain to her husband and their two children.

Husband support

Her husband was forced to enroll the children in a boarding school. He made up his mind to take her to Butabika National Referral Hospital, a facility that handles cases of patients with mental disorders. "He believed that by taking me there, I would overcome my addiction," she says.

But Bulya was often in and out of the hospital. At one point, she was taken to Serenity Centre, a rehabilitation centre on Entebbe Road that empowers people affected by addiction.

All this time, Bulya's husband remained by her side. "He probably stayed in the marriage because many people including therapists would counsel him. Sometimes when we both went for therapy sessions, the counsellor would request to talk to him alone as I waited," she says.

Bulya got over her addiction in 2011. But in all this, she is grateful that her husband has been there.

Besides drugs, there are addictions to alcohol, smoking, behavioural patterns such as pornography, gambling, food and sex.

Wife to the rescue

Janet Bukirwa's husband is recovering from a cigarette addiction.

WALKING OUT NOT SOLUTION

Jonathan Okiru, a family counsellor at Family Life Network says: "Wedding vows emphasise the need for couples to be there for their partners in better or worse situations. So, even when you have a partner struggling with an addiction, you need to be by their side at all times. First, you need to understand why the addiction started? Was it when the marriage started or before? If it was after, you will probably need to find out what sparked it off. Thereafter, seek professional help for both you and your partner."



"Three years into our marriage, my husband lost his job and he resorted to smoking as a coping mechanism. He would lock himself inside the house and smoke from morning to evening," she says.

"Whenever I returned from work, I would find the whole house covered in smoke while he sat on one of the living room sofas puffing away."

Even after her husband secured another job as a marketer, his addiction continued. "His habit started irritating me to the extent that I did not want to get intimate with him. One night, I refused to kiss him because his mouth smelled horribly," she says. Despite discouraging her husband from the habit, he did not stop. Cigarettes have nicotine an addictive

substance.

Bukirwa decided to turn to close family and friends who advised that she takes him to a rehabilitation centre. "He spent five months in one of the recovery centres in town," she says.

Unstable relationships

Not all couples can hang onto relationships where their partners have an addiction.

In the case of Albert Louis Elwa, his alcohol addiction cost him relationships.

"Some of my ex-girlfriends tried getting



me help in vain. I continued drinking heavily and also started sleeping around," Elwa says, adding, "My habits strained the respective relationships and my partners always opted out." He quit alcohol after going for rehabilitation.

Today, Elwa is the founder of FORE and the recovery coach at the organisation.

He says it is important for non-substance users to understand that addicts suffer from a disease, a form of spell characterised with compulsive cravings.

"Rather than walk out of the relationship or blame the addict, seek professional help for yourself and the sufferer," he says.

Elwa uses his past struggle with alcohol addiction to sensitise others on the dangers of alcoholism and how to overcome it.

Albert Louis Elwa says his alcohol addiction cost him relationships. PHOTO BY ESTHER OLUKA

