MENTAL HEALTH CASES RISING AFTER ELECTIONS, SAYS BUTABIKA BOSS

By Sarah Nabakooza

Mental health cases in Uganda tend to rise after general elections, the leadership of Butabika National Referral Mental Hospital told legislators.

The hospital's executive director, Juliet Nakku, said the psychological pressure associated with elections often triggers anxiety and emotional strain, leading to a gradual increase in patients seeking mental health care after the polls.

Nakku said the country must prepare for increased demand for mental health services following such events, even as the national referral facility continues to grapple with severe staffing shortages.

Nakku made the remarks on Monday while appearing before the Parliament's public accounts committee (Central Government) chaired by Mawogola County MP Godfrey Namugga, where the hospital's technical team was responding to audit queries for the financial year ended December 2025.

PHOTO BY TEOPISTA NAKAMYA



Dr Nakku (left) with her deputy Brian Mutamba while appearing before the Parliament's public accounts committee (Central Government) at Parliament, Kampala on Monday

ELECTION OUTCOMES ARE A CULPRIT

Nakku said while the hospital does not yet have consolidated figures, medical teams have started seeing more patients presenting with mental health complications linked to the recent elections.

"After major events anywhere in the world, you are likely to have increments in mental health conditions because of the stress related to those events," Nakku told the committee. "We saw it during COVID-19, and it is the same pattern we observe after elections."

She added that the impact of election-related stress cuts across the entire population, depending on individuals' social circumstances and the personal significance of the election outcomes.

"The whole population can be affected depending on where they are placed in society at the time of the elections and what the elections mean to them," she explained.

Namugga, said there is a need to intensify public awareness on mental health to help reduce the factors that trigger it. She noted that a number of Ugandans still lack adequate information about mental health, which often leads to delayed treatment and deteriorating living.

Namugga emphasised increasing public education and community engagement would help people recognise early signs of mental health challenges and seek timely support, ultimately reducing the burden.

71%

Increase in mental health cases between 2021 and 2024.

UGANDA'S MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

A recent national situation analysis shows that Uganda's mental health burden has been rising sharply in recent years. According to the State of Uganda Population Report 2025, reported mental health cases increased by 71% between 2021 and 2024, rising from 494,326 cases to 843,295 cases recorded at health facilities across the country.

The report further estimates that about 24.2% of adults and 22.9% of children in Uganda are affected by mental health conditions.

The hospital also continues to face immense pressure due to rising patient numbers and limited resources. The audit report showed that out of 836 approved positions, only 396 (47.7%) positions were filled leaving a gap of 440 vacancies.

In addition, 12 staff members were occupying positions not provided for in the approved structure. Nakku told MPs that until recently, the facility had only 10 psychiatrists, though the number has since increased to 14 specialists this financial year.

Even with the additional staff, Nakku said the doctor-patient ratio remains extremely high, currently standing at approximately one psychiatrist to about 100 patients, far from the recommended one doctor to 30 patients in psychiatric care.

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