



**JANET KANTARAMA > MENTAL HEALTH**

## Who will champion green ribbon cause for mental health in Uganda?

**T**he Green Ribbon is the international symbol for Mental Health Awareness and May is Mental Health Month, globally the campaign is fast gaining recognition and support, though this is yet to take root in Uganda even with the growing mental health concerns.

In Contrast, when the Aids scourge hit Uganda in 1983 with about 900 cases reported by 1986, the government and the people of Uganda rose up in unison, adopted several strategies, policies and ran a national campaign against the epidemic earning international recognition for the commendable effort.

These measures have since contributed to reduction in transmission and prevalence, higher figures of persons receiving treatment and living positively.

The Red Ribbon cause in support of IV/AIDS awareness has surely been embraced with noticeable resultant change in the prevalence of the Infection.

Similar measures have been taken up the fight against Polio and Malaria in Uganda among other pandemics

On the other hand in 2017, World Health Organisation (WHO) ranked Uganda among the top six Countries in Africa with the highest cases of mental disorders.

The WHO report on Depression and other Common Mental Disorders giving Global Health Estimates indicates that 11 million out of the 34million or 21% Ugandans suffer from either depressive or anxiety disorders.

These figures are worrying as they however analysts indicate that the number of persons with mental disorders in Uganda could be higher because

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WHO data was gathered on patients seeking treatment yet it is estimated that 65% of persons with mental illness in Uganda do not receive treatment, and are therefore unrecorded.

Media reports show increased numbers of persons dying by suicide, people violently killing others, persons abusing drugs and alcohol, increased workplace accidents due to Neuropsychiatric factors and it is said the National Referral Hospital Butabika is at more than twice its original capacity

Additionally, there is high social stigma towards persons suffering from mental disorders as well as self stigma due to the societal beliefs associating mental illness to witchcraft, demonic attacks or “White people problems”. This bars sick people from seeking care and treatment.

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poverty line estimated at 27 per cent in the UBOS Uganda National Households survey 2016/2017, it goes to show that the statistics of mentally ill persons can only be higher than reported. The statistics confirm that Mental Health is a serious public health and development concern in Uganda.

However little or no effort has been made towards the promotion of good mental Health, raising awareness for Mental disorders, fighting stigma towards persons with mental disorders and increasing access to Mental Health care.

With the mental treatment act of 1964 outdated and incapable of addressing the challenge, The Mental Health Bill, 2014 gathering dust in Parliament to date and no policy framework for Mental Health care, the monster that mental illness is raging on raking careers, families and destroying young and old.

The questions everybody should be asking is: Where is “The Uganda Aids Commission of Mental Health? Where is the government nationwide approach to mental health? Where are the systematic campaigns for mental health? Where is the Mildmay or Taso of mental health?

How is Uganda standing in the promotion for mental health? Who will champion the Green Ribbon Cause in Uganda? Remember, there is no health without mental health!

**Ms Kantarama is the executive director of Safe Places Uganda-Foundation, a NGO advocating for mental health.**