

Parliament should protect the rights of the mentally impaired

Human rights violation among people with mental impairment was a common occurrence in when I was growing up. No one was expected to treat them as human beings. It was fun to throw stones at them and the older people in the village only warned us against provoking them because they could overpower us.

No one told us that they were human beings who deserved respect and dignity. The medicine for them was beating them until they were weakened. We also heard stories that when they were taken to Butabika mental hospital, they were beaten with electrical machines as to calm them down. Our attitude towards them was very strange! No one, not even relatives, gave them food. They were expected to eat from the garbage.

Is it still the same treatment our mentally sick brothers and sisters go through in Uganda today?

In my area, we had two well known mentally impaired people; Ssempebwa and Nakasirye, and the most annoying abuse you could tell someone was that "you look like Ssempebwa" or "Naka-



sirye". We thought the names belonged to only people with mental challenges. We actually thought that they were a type of people born naturally like that until someone told us that Ssempebwa was a very intelligent person before he got the illness when he was at Entebbe Airport waiting to fly to England for his university studies. Indeed, he spoke very good English.

We later learnt that he was staying with his sister who gave up on him because she was convinced that Ssempebwa was bewitched. Later after my Primary Seven, I met Nakasirye at our

church where she was a member of the church choir. She was smart and healthy. She was a different person. I was told that someone picked her and took her to a psychiatric hospital for treatment.

There is an urgent need for Parliament to take steps to promote the rights of mentally impaired people by enacting laws that address their needs. The mentally impaired people too need fair treatment. Their privacy should be protected and they should be given the necessary services.

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