

...ive Director Sharifah Buzeki on street beggars. "We urge... especially children, because this practice fuels a cycle of exploitation and keeps many children...

Cartoon. President Yoweri Museveni has lauded the Parliament of Uganda for their "ideological clarity and commitment in passing the Protection of Sovereignty Bill 2026."



Uganda cannot afford to dismiss psychology

Recent remarks by President Yoweri Museveni questioning the value of psychology degrees, including asking what one can do with a "psychology degree," are not new. He has returned to this line of thinking over the years, often casting doubt on the relevance of arts and social sciences.

But when such statements come from the highest office in the country, they do not remain casual observations. They shape how society understands entire professions. More importantly, they influence whether people feel justified in seeking help for struggles they may already be hiding.

At a time when many Ugandans are quietly battling emotional and psychological distress, that influence is not harmless. According to the World Health Organisation and Uganda's Ministry of Health, nearly one in three Ugandans will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime, while about 12 percent are currently living with one. Across the country, many people are struggling in ways that are not immediately visible. Pain is often endured privately, conversations about mental health are avoided or delayed, and help, when needed most, is either out of reach or never sought at all. This is when silence becomes a coping mechanism, and over time, it becomes a risk.

Dismissing psychology is not simply an academic opinion. It reinforces the very conditions that keep people from speaking, from seeking help, and from being taken seriously when they do. It is not an abstract discipline removed from everyday life, nor is it decorative or optional.

Psychology helps us understand how people think, respond to pressure, and make decisions in moments of vulnerability. It equips professionals to detect distress early, intervene in crisis, and support recovery in ways that are practical and human. It also

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gives language to pain, making it easier for people to understand their struggles and to seek help before it escalates, while creating space for conversations that many people struggle to begin, even when the signs are there but easily missed.

The economic argument is equally clear. There is a national cost to ignoring mental health. Mental health experts estimate that untreated depression costs Uganda hundreds of millions of dollars annually in lost productivity, while investment in mental health yields significant returns through improved well-being and national output.

When conditions such as depression and anxiety go untreated, productivity declines, relationships break down, and long-term social and economic strain increases. Investment in mental health is not only a social responsibility. It is a practical one.

Yet Uganda's capacity to respond remains limited. The number of trained mental health professionals is small relative to the population, serving tens of millions of people, and funding for mental health remains minimal. This gap cannot be closed without psychologists, counsellors, and other trained community-based practitioners working alongside existing health systems.

The question is not what we can do with a psychology degree, but rather what we risk

by ignoring its importance. Uganda must make a deliberate choice: Will our leaders champion psychology and mental health, investing in the future of our nation's well-being, or will we allow neglect to continue costing lives and productivity? The answer requires decisive leadership and immediate action.

But beyond systems and structures, there is something more immediate that can still change, and that is tone.

Leadership shapes how a nation speaks to itself, quietly defining what we value and what we choose to overlook, and in doing so, influences the future of professions a country will one day depend on. At a time when Uganda faces a clear shortage of mental health professionals, there is a pressing need to encourage more students to pursue courses such as psychology, counselling, psychiatry, and the broader study of human behaviour, disciplines that form the foundation of a society capable of understanding itself, responding to distress with care, and preventing losses that should never have to happen.

When young people hear their leaders question the value of these fields, the impact discourages interest and weakens the very systems the country urgently needs to strengthen. Encouragement, on the other hand, would signal that these professions matter, that they are needed, and that those who choose them are contributing to national well-being.

Uganda has the expertise and opportunity to answer this challenge. What is required, especially at the highest levels, is a clear recognition that mental health is not secondary to development, but part of its foundation. Psychology is not useless. Ignoring it is.

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