

# Drug abuse a key challenge facing youth

BY JOSEPH KATO  
jkato@ug.nationmedia.com

**T**om Ssebugwawo was reportedly killed by drugs in Kakoba Division, Mbarara Municipality, in June this year. The deceased had reportedly spent years struggling with an addiction to heroin and cannabis.

Sharing Ssebugwawo's story, Moses Tumusiime, an anti-drug abuse campaigner in Mbarara, says the 23-year-old had run mad by the time he breathed his last.

"He started abusing drugs when he was 14 years old," says Tumusiime, adding that Ssebugwawo's sister too is a victim of drugs and is currently undergoing rehabilitation.

Ssebugwawo's demise is a picture of many youth whose life is in danger for abusing drugs.

A survey by Uganda Harm Reduction Network on drug usage in urban areas shows Kampala and Mbale are top drug abusers. Gracious Atwine, the coordinator Community Alliance Uganda, says the hotspots of drug abuse in Kampala are Kabalagala, Kisenyi, Bwaise, Kasokoso, Namuwongo, Bakuli, Bwaise, Ndeeba and Kawempe.

The police head of anti-narcotics, Mr Tinka Zarugaba, says locally produced drugs such Njaga (cannabis) and Mairungi (Khat) are the most consumed drugs in urban centres.

Kampala Metropolitan Police commander Frank Mwesigwa says they arrest five to 10 drugs abusers every night, with more than 1,300 cases recorded between January and June this year.

"Drugs are one of the major mitigating factors of criminality in Kampala. What we had done is to crack down drug users. We arrest on average five people every night, sometimes the number goes beyond 10," he says.

Other than drugs being cheap, Mr Mwesigwa says parents have contributed to drug abuse in Kampala because they have neglected their parenting roles. He says most youth engaged in criminality and drug abuse are of school-going age. "We find most of the drug abusers are children. They are young people who should be cared for by their parents. Parents do not know that their children abuse drugs," Mwesigwa says.

Dr David Basangwa, the Butabika Hospital director, says the number of drug abuse victims being admitted to facility has increased from 700 to about 900 in the last two years.

"We have noticed that alcohol is making many people develop mental problems especially the young people. Most of the victims we have at our facility are the youth aged 16 to 30. We need regulation on alcohol consumption to save the young generation," he says.