



**Rebecca
Kyomugisha**

Time to take mental health issues seriously

I was delighted to read a comprehensive piece in the *New Vision* of Monday, August 7, titled: Why mental health is on the rise in Uganda, highlighting the issue of mental health, but this illness in Uganda is still something people talk about in hushed tones.

It is an illness that has a lot of mystery surrounding it with stories of witchcraft and demonic possession running rife.

However, this is propagated by the fact that not enough research has been done on the functioning of the brain and the mind. It being such a delicate organ; as well as the fact that information on the categorisation of different mental disorders is not readily available to the public.

I have read many stories and attended various workshops with highly learned individuals in various fields including high ranking government officials, making (for lack of a better word) sweeping/blanket and ignorant comments about people with mental health issues in a dismissive way.

I participated in one of the recent parliamentary sessions where one of the Members of Parliament gave a scenario of a mother in his constituency, who, a few days after birthing her child, threw this child into the pit-latrine.

He expressed extreme disdain for this mother and petitioned that these mothers be incarcerated for life. I shook

my head in dismay, as I wondered why he and others could not try to think further and see why a mother would carry a baby to term, go through a painful labour only to dump the baby.

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thing as pre-partum and post-partum depression, which can account for many of the cases of mothers dumping or even killing their newborns. The Uganda of today does not always provide for a loving and safe environment for women to carry and bring forth babies.

Poverty rates are high, rejection rates are high and there is not enough social support as in times past, where raising children was the business of the whole community. These days, when you have a child, woe unto you if you cannot hire enough help and can you even trust this help?

When mothers suffer from pregnancy-related mental disorders, people around them dismiss it saying; "we do not know what has become of her!" Until something drastic happens or until there are clear signs of a breakdown.

Mental health issues are, and must be the concern of us all. Mental illness is real and it is here with us, let us treat it with the same priority we do all other illnesses. It should be part of primary health care.

Today, it is that mother or the man you see walking while talking to himself and picking things from the rubbish skip, tomorrow, it could be any of us.

The writer is a professional psychologist