

## Drug addicts dying in our cells - Police

BY JOSEPH KATO

jkato@ug.nationmedia.com

**KAMPALA.** Senior police officers have revealed that some drug addicts die in their custody because their officers lack the skills of handling the suspects or examining the drugs they misuse.

A senior police officer at the police's narcotics desk in Kampala told a stakeholders' conference on reducing drug usage that their officers are often left confused in managing substance abusers involved in crime, with some of the suspects dying in their cells.

A senior superintendent of police, who preferred anonymity because he is not authorised to speak for the police, said: "You arrest a suspect for committing a crime and after a few hours you hear him screaming in the cells. When you open to check what has happened he then tells you to give him some drugs. When you resist, you find him dead or when he's about to die."

The one-day workshop was organised by Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) and Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) to bring together a wide range of players to explore ways of solving alcohol, drug and substance abuse.

Another senior police officer, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, submitted that their officers have now resorted to keeping various drugs as part of their first aid kits so that they can save the life of drug addicts in their custody.

"We have now instructed our cell guards not to hesitate when a suspect asks for drugs. You'd rather give the drugs than losing life. Many of the suspects we get in capital offences are drug addicts," she added.

Mr Frank Mwesigwa, the Kampala Metropolitan police commander, told this newspaper in an interview in July that their officers arrest at least 10 drug addicts daily, totaling to 300 cases a month.

While giving statistics on drug abuse in August, Anti-Narcotics

Unit commissioner Tinka Zarugaba said a drug addict suspect once collapsed and died at Kibuli cells after he was denied access to drug.

In reaction to police officers' revelation, Ms Julian Langille, the CADCA's international trainer on drug and alcohol control, urged the law and order sector and parents not to discriminate such youths, but instead address the issues that force the youth into substance abuse.

"When you understand the circumstances that forced the youth into abusing drugs, the solution will be easier to find. Drug addiction is chronic and costly in terms of treatment and rehabilitation. But we can address drug abuse by reducing the risk factors," Ms Langille said.

The UYDEL executive director, Mr Rogers Kasirye, said they have embarked on sensitising communities in Nansana Municipality on the outskirts of Kampala to participate in the fight against drug abuse after a recent study revealed that children as young as 13 years abuse drugs in the area.

# 300

THE NUMBER OF DRUG  
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"We wondered why crime rate was high in Nansana. We conducted a study and some of the factors we discovered include alcohol and drug abuse. We are now teaching the residents to be part of the fight against drugs," Mr Kasirye said.

At least 12 women were killed between May and July in Nansana Municipality, especially at Kibulooka, Nansana West B and Masiitoowa zones.

Ms Langille and Mr Kasirye said community problems require community solution and warned that increasing police posts and building perimeter walls would not reduce criminality, unless the factors responsible are addressed