

MBARARA. Child experts have warned parents against neglecting their children, saying this has pushed some young people into risky habits, including drug and substance abuse.

Speaking during the launch of a community sensitisation drive on the dangers of alcohol abuse among students last Friday, Ms Macklean Tumuhimbise, the manager of Freed Hearts Rehabilitation Centre in Ruti, Mbarara City, expressed concern about the future of the youth if serious interventions are not introduced.

"Parents have become so busy and have no time for their children. They trust them with too much money, and this money starts controlling them. When you tell a parent that 'you are the source of the problem,' he or she begins telling you, 'but I gave my child everything.' They do not understand that it is not the material things a child needs but the love, parental bonding and attachment," she said.

She said over the past five years, they have rehabilitated more than 100 young people struggling with excessive drinking, and described the growing number of youth caught up in drug use as a disaster.

Mr Justus Musoke, a counselling psychologist at St Francis Counsellor Training Institute in Nyamitanga, Mbarara City South, said many children today feel disconnected from their parents.

"Parents are paying more attention to their work than the

Experts blame youth drug abuse on parental neglect

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According to the 2024 National Census report by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (Ubos), about 12 percent (an estimated 5.5 million Ugandans) aged 10 and above, are likely facing mental health challenges.

inherent needs of children to be safe and secure. They give financial resources or objects to mean care and as such, they get detached from them. They end up hooked to worldly things, including drugs," he said in an interview last Friday.

He said many children who grow up feeling distant from their parents start searching for answers about who they are and where they belong. When they don't get proper guidance, they easily fall into risky behaviours such as drug abuse, early marriages and dropping out of school.

Mr Musoke added that on a normal day, out of 10 clients he handles, six are young people.

The head teacher of Mbarara Junior School, Mr Nathan Mugume, said: "The problem with parents these days is that they

assume it is money that is needed for a child to live better. They spend little time with them. Some students come from holidays where their behaviour is wanting because parents don't spend time to love, counsel and guide them."

The Bishop of Ankole Diocese, Rt Rev Sheldon Mwesiga, warned parents that simply sending children to school does not guarantee success in life, especially today when social evils are on the rise.

"The greatest test on earth is not how much you're educated. We have seen the most brainy, educated drown in booze (alcohol), and sexual promiscuity and live meaningless lives. Don't wait to regret, sit with your children, counsel and guide them, teach them life skills," he said.

Dr Chris Kigezo, an addiction treatment and rehabilitation expert, also the director of Freed-Hearts Uganda, said if nothing is done to curb drug abuse, the country could face an even bigger crisis of wasted young generations by 2035.

"Let us borrow a leaf from Kenya and create an authority to deal with drug abuse. The government should have a centralised authority to work with private players to address the challenge of drug abuse," he said.