

Education

New campaign highlights the cost of poor sleep on learners

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Amid growing concern over poor sleeping habits and their connection to mental health challenges among learners, Reach A Hand Uganda has launched a nationwide campaign aimed at promoting healthy sleep practices among adolescents, particularly students.

Dubbed the Quality Sleep Campaign, the initiative seeks to raise public awareness through mass media engagement, advocating for a mindset shift that recognises sleep as a basic necessity rather than a luxury.

The campaign was officially launched on February 6, 2026, with a public awareness march along Lungujja Avenue in Kampala, drawing attention to the importance of adequate sleep within

school settings.

The initiative tackles several critical issues, including the widespread belief that sacrificing sleep improves academic performance, the link between poor sleep and conditions such as depression and anxiety, the need to balance study demands with adequate rest, and the need to dispel common myths surrounding sleep health.

Studies indicate that inadequate sleep increases the risk of high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and mental health disorders. Among adolescents, the effects are often immediately evident in learning environments, presenting as poor concentration, excessive daytime sleepiness, and reduced mental resilience.

A long-term study conducted in Uganda by the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Uganda Virus Research



Institute (UVRI), and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) identified insufficient sleep as a major contributor to conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. For young people, however, the most urgent concern remains mental wellbeing and alertness in daily activities.

The findings revealed troubling sleep patterns among students. Median sleep duration on schooldays stood at just 4.8 hours, increasing to 6.5 hours on non-schooldays. Only 12.8 per cent of learners

achieved the recommended seven to 11 hours of sleep on schooldays, compared to 38.5 per cent on non-schooldays.

Boarding students were found to be particularly affected, reporting higher levels of anxiety, disrupted sleep, and fatigue compared to their day-school counterparts. Interviews pointed to a widespread lack of awareness, with many students, parents, and school administrators viewing sleep as unnecessary or believing adolescents require less rest than adults.