

'Social media affecting learners' mental health'

By Juliet Kasirye

Although social media fosters creativity and enhances digital skills among learners, unregulated access is harming young souls in unprecedented ways, education experts have noted.

"I have observed students who suddenly go quiet, withdraw and stop sharing their challenges with anyone. Often, by the time you realise they are facing a mental health problem, it is too late," Dr Lilian Matovu, the principal of Our Lady of Africa schools, said during the screening of a play at Theatre Labonita in Kampala on Saturday.

The play, which focused on mental health among learners, was organised by Our Lady of Africa schools.

Matovu said many learners are facing mental health challenges, but are neglected

by parents, which worsens the situation. "In some families, you realise that parents leave for work before children wake up and return home when they are asleep. Such behaviour not only depresses children, but also affects their mental wellbeing in the long run," she stated.

The play, which was under the title *The Genz, the Weight We Carry*, focused on mental health, challenges faced by the boy child and social media, highlighting their impact on the Genz. In the course of the play, students revealed how peer influence, dissatisfaction with one's possessions and social media are luring young people into drug abuse.

ALOYSIOUS MATOVU'S REQUEST

Critiquing the play, Aloysius Matovu Joy, a drama actor, requested the Ministry of Education and Sports to support such initiatives

ATTENTION...

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because they can help to reduce the various problems faced by adolescents.

"Drugs are very rampant in schools and teachers are having problems controlling drug abuse," he said.

According to the study conducted by Prof. Helen Weise from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical medicine, at least 17.6% of school going children in Uganda are struggling with depressive mental disorder.

The research was conducted in conjunction with the Medical Research Council, Uganda virus Research Institute and Reach A hand, a charity.

Deborah Ruth Alepus, a teacher from Our Lady of Africa



Students of Our Lady of Africa schools acting in a drama play showing how drugs affect children. This was at Theatre Labonita in Kampala, last Saturday

Junior School Bukasa, urged parents to spare time for their children. "There are students who consult social media whenever they face a challenge because it won't judge or criticise them," Bukasa said.

STUDENTS SPEAK OUT

John Benedict Wotti, a Senior Four student from Our Lady of Africa SS Namilyango, said many students are addicted to pornography, which they

consume through social media.

"As Senior Four candidates, this is the time we need our parents' encouragement and support to excel. Unfortunately, some parents do not encourage their children to study hard, instead they reprimand them, failing to recognise the immense pressure we carry. They ignore the extended school hours and preps, focusing only on the final results," Wotti stated.

Warren Daniel Irumba, a Senior Four student, said: "If I have friends who use drugs, I will automatically take them to fit in their group. To address mental health issues in schools, we request school administrators to organise special counselling sessions for stressed learners and engage people who have gone through rehabilitation centres, such as Butabika Hospital to share their experiences."