

# Taking care of police officers' mental health is key

A recent study among traffic police officers in Kampala revealed that nearly one in every five officers examined showed signs of noise-induced hearing loss due to prolonged exposure to traffic noise, vehicle horns, sirens, and the daily demands of managing traffic in a busy city. The findings remind us that every police assignment carries occupational risks.

For traffic officers, the danger may be hearing impairment. For Child and Family Protection Officers (CFPOs), however, the risks are often psychological, emotional, and relational. This raises an important question: if prolonged exposure to traffic noise can affect hearing, what are the long-term effects of daily exposure to domestic violence, child abuse, sexual offences, family conflicts, neglect, and trauma on the officers who handle such cases throughout their careers?

The Child and Family Protection Department occupies a unique position within the Uganda Police Force. Unlike many other policing functions, CFPOs work directly with victims of violence, abuse, neglect, and family breakdown. On any given day, an officer may interview a defiled child, comfort a survivor of gender-based violence, mediate a domestic dispute, investigate child neglect, or counsel a family in crisis.

These responsibilities are emotionally demanding because they involve human suffering in its most personal form. Repeated exposure to traumatic stories can result in what psychologists describe as secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue.

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## Jackson Mucunguzi Mental health

There is a common assumption that officers who specialise in family protection are immune from relationship challenges because of their professional training. However, professional knowledge does not eliminate human vulnerability. Just as doctors fall sick and lawyers become involved in legal disputes, CFPOs may also experience marital stress, parenting challenges, and emotional exhaustion despite their expertise.

One of the least discussed occupational hazards within policing is emotional overload. CFPOs are expected to remain calm when victims are crying, objective when listening to disturbing accounts of abuse, and professional while mediating emotionally charged disputes. Over time, the cumulative effect of such experiences can contribute to burnout, anxiety, depression, family conflict, and reduced job satisfaction if adequate

support systems are lacking.

This challenge is not a sign of weakness. It is the result of prolonged exposure to trauma without sufficient opportunities for recovery and emotional renewal. The Uganda Police Force has made significant progress in strengthening victim-centred policing. The next frontier should be officer wellness. Just as traffic officers require regular health assessments, CFPOs require psychological support, peer counselling, stress management training, family enrichment programmes, and structured debriefing after traumatic cases.

These interventions are not luxuries. They are investments in organisational effectiveness. An emotionally healthy officer is more resilient, more productive, and better equipped to serve victims and maintain healthy family relationships. As we continue strengthening child protection and gender-based violence prevention efforts, we must also protect those who stand on the front-line of this work. The well-being of the protector is an essential part of protecting society. An intentional healthy officer strengthens a non-violent healthy family, and healthy happy families build stronger communities and a stronger nation. Life begins and ends at home; let's all go and be heroes at home first before getting society medals. Your health first, nucleus family and Uganda service follow.

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