

MEDIAN SLEEP DURATION ON SCHOOL DAYS IS 4.8 HOURS – STUDY

By Juliet Kasirye

EXPERTS ASK GOVT TO **REGULATE** SLEEPING HOURS FOR LEARNERS

As children report back to school, experts have urged the Government to tackle the growing issue of sleep deprivation among learners, particularly in boarding schools, warning that it is not only impacting academic performance, but also their mental well-being.

The head of programmes at Reach A Hand Uganda, Benson Muhindo, said it is advisable for children to sleep for eight hours. Unfortunately, he said the pressure from schools and parents to excel academically often leaves the children struggling to cope.

“Adequate sleep is not a luxury, it is essential for learning, mental health, and overall well-being. Maintaining regular sleep schedules, creating supportive environments, and using good-quality bedding can prevent long-term health problems,” he said.

Since the effects of having less sleep are often immediate and visible in the classroom, Muhindo said addressing sleep deprivation will be part of delivering quality education.

His plea follows a study conducted in Uganda by the Medical Research Council, the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI), and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

The study revealed that insufficient sleep is a major contributor to health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. The median sleep duration on school days was 4.8 hours, rising to 6.5 hours on non-school days.

The limited sleeping time, according to the study, is attributed to heavy workloads, early wake-up times, sometimes as early as 3:00am, peer pressure, extracurricular activities and late-night social interactions.

The study further indicated that students in the day section also do not get enough sleep because they struggle with household responsibilities, noise,

overcrowded homes and unlimited screen time.

“Many learners reported dozing off in class or taking naps during breaks simply to cope. Female students consistently reported poorer sleep satisfaction and alertness than their male peers, illustrating the scale of the challenge,” the report stated.

Additionally, the study disclosed that boarding students fared worse than day students, experiencing more anxiety, sleep disruption and fatigue.

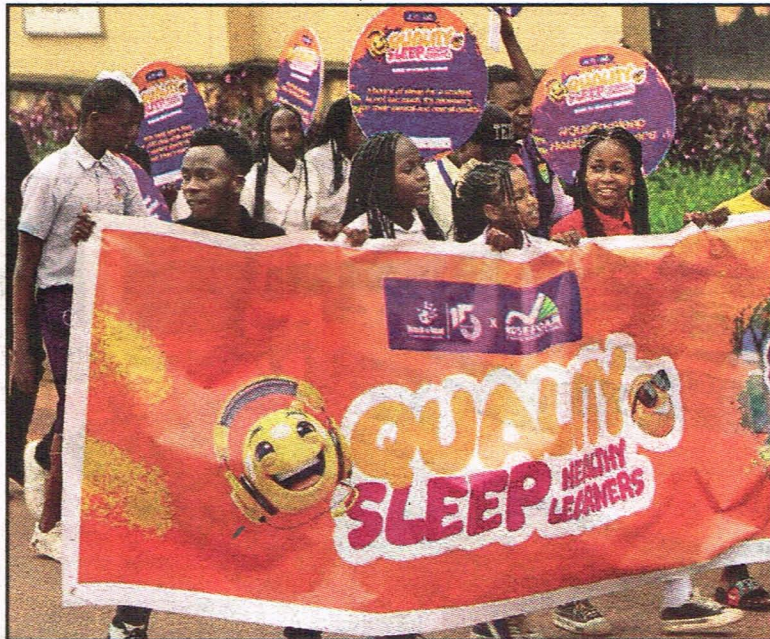
“Only 12.8% of students reported getting the recommended seven to 11 hours on school days, and 38.5% on non-school days.”

To ensure learners get enough rest, on February 6, Reach A Hand Uganda rolled out a campaign focusing on the importance of sleep in schools.

This initiative will address the widespread undervaluing of sleep for academic success, the association of depression and anxiety with poor sleep, health, the need to balance studying with adequate rest, and the demystification of common myths surrounding sleep.

To manage learners’ sleeping hours, the technical specialist on sexual reproductive health and rights, Sheila Kasabiiti, advised parents to remove gadgets such as phones and tablets that keep children awake.

“Adequate sleep balances your mind, emotions and



Learners and other stakeholders participating in a march organised by Reach A Hand Uganda in Lungujja, Kampala, last week to raise awareness about healthy sleep



Wellness: Muhindo

physical well-being. If learners have enough sleep, they will be better equipped to participate in daily school activities,” she said.

The headteacher of Meko Learning Centre in Mukono, Alex

Opio, said learners need to sleep for at least six hours, depending on their age.

“For example, kids who watch television late at night often sleep at 11:00pm or midnight. But if learners from Primary Four to Seven finish preps by 8:30pm or 9:00pm and go to bed, they will sleep better and be more energetic for their activities,” he said.

PARENTS SPEAK OUT

Rose Namusisi, a parent, said many learners struggle to concentrate in class due to waking up too early.

“The school van used to pick my daughter up at 5:30am for an 8:00am class. Since she was always dozing in class, I took her to a boarding school where she wakes up at 6:00am and starts class at 8:00am,” she said.

Joyce Mukisa, a mother of three, urged the Government to set rules on study hours so that learners get enough sleep.

“When my son was in Primary Seven, he said they would sleep at midnight and wake up at 4:00am to read their books. Though he got good grades, sleeping for a few hours strained him,” Mukisa said.

The clinical psychologist and researcher at Medical Research Council/UVRI, Titus Ssesanga Kisa, said if learners do not get enough sleep, their hormones which are responsible for growth will be compromised.

“When learners don’t get enough sleep, they easily get agitated, distract others and also keep stepping out of class. If learners’ sleeping hours are compromised, their sleep deficit will be manifested in their daily living or exposed to early onset of mental illness,” Kisa said.

To improve the learners’ performance and concentration in class, he asked the Government to address this growing concern before it manifests into serious conditions such as depression and anxiety, among others.