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COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING, DESIGN, ART AND TECHNOLOGY
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MASTER OF ARTS IN FINE ART

MIXED MEDIA PRINTMAKING AS A TOOL IN RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT THE CAUSES OF MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES IN KAMPALA DISTRICT

BY

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Declaration

I, Kajebe Jacob Joshua, declare that the content in this study is my original work and has not been submitted for any other degree award to any other university other than Makerere University.

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Dedication

I wholeheartedly dedicate this to my cherished family, friends, Faces up Uganda, Harvest International School and mentors whose unwavering support and guidance have been the bedrock of my academic journey. Your encouragement has been a beacon, lighting my path and fueling my aspirations.

Additionally, my sincere gratitude extends to the scholars whose insightful work has profoundly influenced and enriched this study. Your contributions have served as a wellspring of knowledge, shaping the foundation of this research endeavor.

Table of Contents

Declaration ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Approval ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
Dedication iii
List of Figures ix
List of Tables xi
Abstract xii
CHAPTER ONE 1
1.0 Introduction 1
1.1 Positionality Statement 1
1.11 Definition of Key Terms 3
1.11.1. Mixed Media Printmaking: 3
1.11.2 Mental Health 3
1.11.3 Causes of Mental Health Challenges 4
1.11.4 Public Awareness 4
1.11.5 Textured narratives 4
1.2 Background 5
1.3 Problem Statement 15
1.4 Purpose of Study 16
1.5 Specific Objectives 16
1.6 Research Questions 17
1.7 Scope of Study 17
1.7.1 Content Scope 17
1.7.2 Geographical Scope 17
1.7.3 Time Scope 18
1.8 Significance of the Study 18
1.9 Justification 19
1.10 Theoretical Framework 19
CHAPTER TWO 21

LITERATURE REVIEW 21
2.1 Introduction 21
2.1.1 Mental Health Challenges in Uganda 22
2.2 The Therapeutic and Communicative role of Visual Art 23
2.2.1 Mixed Media in Ugandan and African Art Practice 24
2.2.2 Art and Public Health Communication 24
2.2.3 Newspaper Coverage between Stigma and Awareness 26
2.2.4 Radio and Television Discourses 26
2.2.5 Digital Media and Social Platforms 27
2.2.6 Ugandan Artists and Digital Platforms 27
2.2.7 Global Digital Art and Mental Health Campaigns 28
2.2.8 Emerging Technologies: Digital Printmaking and AI 28
2.2.9 Media Representations of Art and Mental Health 29
2.3 Policy Reports on Mental Health in Uganda 29
2.3.1 Policy Frameworks and the Ugandan Context 29
2.4 Global Case Studies of Printmaking in Mental Health 31
2.4.1 South Africa: Printmaking and Post-Apartheid Trauma 31
2.4.2 Zimbabwe: Print and Textile as Social Commentary 32
2.4.3 Indigenous Australia: Printmaking and Cultural Identity 32
Conclusion 33
CHAPTER THREE 35
METHODOLOGY 35
3.1 Introduction 35
3.2 Research Design 35
3.3 Area of Study 37
3.4 Study Population and size 37
3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS 40
3.5.1 Library and Archival Research 40

3.5.2 Questionnaires 40
3.5.3 Studio Practice and Artistic Production 40
3.5.4 Observation 41
3.5.5 Online Public Feedback Survey 42
3.5.6 Semi Structured interviews 43
3.5.7 Fieldwork Schedule and Engagement 43
3.6 Data Analysis 44
3.6.1 Data Quality Control 45
3.7 Ethical Considerations 45
3.8 Limitations 46
3.9 Conclusion 46
CHAPTER FOUR 48
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS 48
4.0 Introduction 48
4.1 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: OBJECTIVE 1: 49
4.1.1 Academic Pressure 53
4.1.2 Time Pressure and Societal Expectations 54
4.1.3 Economic Pressure and Financial Instability 55
4.1.4 Public Opinion and Social Judgment 57
4.1.5 Concealed Emotional Struggles and Gendered Suppression 58
4.2 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS OBJECTIVE TWO. 61
4.2.1 Dr. Lilian Nabulime – Sculpture as Dialogue on HIV/AIDS 61
4.2.2 Fred Kato Mutebi – Printmaking for Civic and Health Education 63
4.2.3 Taga Nuwagaba – Documenting Cultural Identity and Environmental Issues 65
4.2.4 Dr. Sarah Nakisanze – Textiles and Participatory Fashion for Social Sustainability 67
4.2.5 Robert Ssewanyana – Participatory Art for HIV/AIDS Awareness 69
4.2.6 Martin Senkubuge – Portraiture to Challenge Skin-Related Stigma 71
Conclusion 77

4.3 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS FOR Objective 3: To produce mixed media prints that visually communicate the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala. 78
4.7.1 Participatory Workshops and Visual Exploration 80
4.7.3 Printmaking as a Catalyst for Participation and Emotional Expression 82
4.7.4 Semi-structured interviews: Mental Health Narratives through Art 84
4.7.5 Healing Through Process: Repetition, Texture, and Control 85
4.7.6 Building Social Connection and Collaborative Healing 86
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS OF OBJECTIVE 4: 105
4.0 Introduction 105
4.1 Online Exhibition 105
4.1.0 Responses from online exhibition 106
4.1.1 Emotional Engagement 106
4.1.2 Interpretation and Understanding 107
4.1.3 Barriers to Understanding 108
4.1.4 Suggestions for Improvement 109
4.1.5 General Feedback on the artworks from the online exhibition. 109
4.4.6 Analysis of Findings (Objective 4) 110
4.5 The Major Finding focusing on positive side of mental health 111
4.5.1 Rest, Reflect, Recharge 111
CHAPTER FIVE: 114
DISCUSSION RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS 114
5.0 Introduction 114
5.1 Contribution to Knowledge 116
5.2 Limitations of the Study 117
5.3 Recommendations for Further Research 117
5.4 Conclusion 118
References 120
Appendix 1: Questionnaires 126
Appendix 2 : Interview guide 130

Appendix 3 : Thematic Coding Sheet of the Exhibition Feedback 131
Appendix 4 : Google Feedback Form 133
Appendix 5 : Appendix 6 136
Appendix 7 137
Appendix 8. Makerere University Fieldwork introduction letter. 138
Appendix 9: Consent Letter from Faces Up-Uganda. 139
Appendix 10 140

List of Figures

Figure 1*:* Patterned Bark-cloth from Buganda. 185cm x 197.5cm. Collection of the British Museum, London adopted from (Nakazibwe 2005) 6
Figure 2*:* Patterned Bark-cloth from Buganda. 210cm x 320cm. Collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford Photo adopted from (Nakazibwe 2005) 7
Figure 3*:* Patterned bark-cloth from Buganda. 251cm x 202cm. Collection of the British Museum, London Photo adopted from (Nakazibwe 2005) 7
Figure 4*:* The Wooden Albion Hand-Proofing Press introduced by Alexander Mackay (1878–1879). Currently part of the Uganda Museum's ethnographic collection. 8
Figure 5*:* Margaret Trowell, "Mother and Child." An example of Trowell's early print work focusing on motherhood and social identity. 9
Figure 6*:* New Vision Headline (May 16, 2022) – "14 million Ugandan's mentally sick"..... 11
Figure 7: Daily Monitor Headline (February 22, 2025) – "Growing Mental Health Crisis: Many Graduates Admitted at Butabika – Dr Nakku" 12
Figure 8: Mind Map Showing Causes /Effects /Solutions to Mental Health. 49
Figure 9: Male and Female, Sculptures; by Lilian Mary Nabulime 2004. 61
Figure 10: Ensobi Yaani (Who is to Blame?) by Fred Kato Mutebi. 63
Figure 11*:* Taga Nuwagaba shows of one of his paintings which he has used to teach the public about totems 65
Figure 12*:* Nakisanze Sarah's, Past Traditions artwork (2020): An Inclusive Livelihood Resource (Photo by Hector Mutebi Mulwana) 67
Figure 13*:* Some of the HIV awareness and prevention messages engraved on furniture at an exhibition by Mr. Robert Ssewanyana at the Makerere Art Gallery, MTSIFA, CEDAT, Makerere University, and Kampala Uganda. 69
Figure 14*:* A charcoal and pencil drawing of Isaac Kyoyeta, an events manager in Kampala. Photograph: Joshua Ssemaganda and Anthony Patience/Courtesy Martin Senkubuge 71
Figure 15*:* One of the online poster adverts by Faces up Uganda on a campaign ART FOR EDUCATORS TRAINING. 73
Figure 16*:* A poster by Muundo foundation for an art activity during the word vitiligo awareness month. 75
Figure 17: Researcher in a one-on-one sketching with a participant. 81
Figure 18*:* Students sharing color pallets and water at a station table at a print making workshop at faces up 82

Figure 19*:* During a wood block workshop at faces up 83
Figure 20*:* The researcher in one of the print making workshops at Faces Up Uganda center in Masanafu.....83
Figure 21*:* One of the artworks by one of the workshop participants.....84
Figure 22*:* Students showing off their group works created from the print making workshop at faces up 86
Figure 23: Printmaking tools for wood block printing.....87
Figure 24:Visual board of mental health references about Uganda from the work. 88
Figure 25*:* Sketches of mental health related contributors Work.....89
Figure 26*:* The off cuts of the wood block from the work.....90
Figure 27*:* The wood blocks used for reduction printing by the researcher. 91
Figure 28*:* Academic Pressure, mixed media reduction print on paper and fabric, 32*48 cm, photograph by Researcher.....94
Figure 29*:* Concealed Struggles, mixed media reduction print on paper and fabric, 32*48cm, photograph by Researcher.....96
Figure 30: Time Pressure and Age-Related Expectations, mixed media reduction print on paper, 32 × 48 cm, photograph by Researcher. 98
Figure 31*:* Shows the mixed media print developed on the theme of Economic Pressure, photo by Researcher.....100
Figure 32*:* Public Opinion and Social Judgment (2024), Mixed Media Reduction Print, 32 × 48 cm. Photograph by Researcher. 102
Figure 33*:* Shows the Key for the mixed media print developed on the theme of Rest, Reflect, Recharge, photo by Researcher.....111
Figure 34*:* Shows the mixed media print developed on the Rest, Reflect, Recharge, photo by Researcher.....112

List of Tables

Table 1: Determining sample size for a finite population, for (n 50 and 300).....39

Abstract

Mental health challenges in Kampala District, Uganda, are shaped by intertwined social, economic, academic, and cultural pressures. Despite increasing recognition of mental health concerns, stigma and silence continue to limit public understanding and open dialogue about their underlying causes. While existing awareness initiatives have primarily relied on conventional communication approaches, limited attention has been given to the potential of visual art as a culturally relevant means of engaging communities. This study therefore examined the role of mixed media printmaking in raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District, exploring its potential to translate complex social and emotional experiences into accessible visual narratives that encourage reflection and dialogue.

Guided by the Pragmatic Theory of Art and the Constructivist paradigm, the study adopted a qualitative Arts-Based Research (ABR) approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, participatory workshops, observation, literature review, and studio practice. The findings informed the development of a series of mixed media print artworks that visually communicated the lived experiences of participants. Thematic and visual analyses revealed five major contributors to mental health challenges: academic pressure, time pressure and societal expectations, economic instability, public judgment, and concealed emotional struggles.

The study found that mixed media printmaking functioned as both a reflective and communicative platform, enabling participants' experiences to be transformed into symbolic visual narratives while encouraging audiences to engage with complex mental health issues. Through the integration of layering, texture, collage, stitching, and printmaking techniques, the artworks mirrored the complexity of lived experiences and created opportunities for empathy, dialogue, and critical reflection. Audience evaluation demonstrated that viewers were able to interpret the intended messages, relate them to their own experiences, and engage in meaningful conversations about the causes of mental health challenges.

The study concludes that mixed media printmaking is an effective and culturally relevant visual communication tool for raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District. By transforming lived experiences into compelling visual narratives, the study expands the role of printmaking beyond aesthetic practice into socially responsive communication and community engagement.

It demonstrates the potential of mixed media printmaking to foster public reflection, challenge stigma, and support arts-based mental health awareness initiatives in Uganda. The study recommends integrating mixed media printmaking into schools, community organisations, galleries, and public awareness programmes as a complementary approach to mental health communication.

Keywords: Mixed media printmaking, mental health challenges, visual communication, Arts-Based Research, public awareness, community engagement, Kampala District, Uganda.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

This thesis explores the role of mixed media printmaking in raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District. Mental health issues have become a pressing concern globally, with significant social, economic, and cultural impacts. In Uganda, and particularly within Kampala's rapidly urbanizing environment, factors such as economic hardship, academic pressure, and complex interpersonal relationships contribute to rising mental health vulnerabilities (Bwanika, Hawkins et al. 2022). Despite this, mental health remains widely stigmatized and misunderstood, limiting effective communication and intervention.

Mixed media printmaking, a form of visual art combining diverse materials and techniques such as painting, collage, and print offers a powerful and multilayered medium through which the nuanced and often hidden realities of mental health can be expressed. By conveying symbolic and textured narratives, this artistic practice can evoke empathy, challenge stigma, and foster public dialogue in ways that traditional textual or clinical approaches may struggle to achieve.

Around the world, visual arts have proven effective in mental health advocacy, humanizing lived experiences and promoting inclusion (Bwanika, Hawkins et al. 2022). In Kampala, emerging artistic and community initiatives demonstrate the potential of mixed media and other visual storytelling methods to engage audiences and encourage awareness. This study investigates how mixed media printmaking can visually articulate the underlying causes of mental health challenges in Kampala, evaluate its effectiveness as a communication tool, and contribute to advocacy efforts aimed at reducing stigma and enhancing mental health literacy.

By integrating creative practice with social research, this study aims to highlight the capacity of mixed media printmaking to function as a vehicle for social change within the urban Ugandan context, offering meaningful insights into the intersection of art, health communication, and community engagement.

1.1 Positionality Statement

This research on mental health arises from deeply personal experiences I encountered during the final stages of my bachelor's degree. At that time, I grappled with depression, which I

initially did not fully acknowledge. Immersed in intense artistic labor, spending nights in the studio, I believed relentless effort alone would secure success. However, underlying this dedication was emotional turmoil that went unaddressed.

A significant turning point came when I was informed that no financial resources were available to support my major project; an unexpected and difficult reality for someone accustomed to consistent academic support. Rather than confront this challenge directly, I threw myself into producing an extensive body of work while also turning to alcohol as a coping mechanism. Paradoxically, during this period of intense but isolated labor, I received significant external validation; peers praised my artistic maturity and commended me for "becoming a man." Encouraged by these perceptions, I isolated myself further from family and friends, convinced that success required cutting off relationships that did not directly contribute to my progress. I told myself I would reconnect once I had "made it in life."

This self-imposed isolation fostered deep loneliness and emotional suppression, with moments of despair and questioning my sense of purpose. These experiences, although painful, catalyzed my desire to understand and address mental health challenges, particularly those that remain hidden or unspoken within communities. Art became the avenue through which I could articulate these complex and often invisible realities. At the time, my primary medium was woodcut printmaking, a form that provided both creative release and a way to process emotional experiences. This connection between artistic practice and mental health motivated my pursuit of research focusing specifically on the causes of mental health challenges.

My ongoing curatorial and community-focused work of creating spaces that encourage dialogue and healing through art serves as an extension of these personal experiences. By formally situating these lived experiences within academic inquiry, this study embodies a reflexive approach, acknowledging how my positionality shapes the research process, interpretations, and relationships with communities (Burnette, Sanders, et al., 2011). This intentional integration of personal, artistic, and social engagement grants nuanced insight into how mixed media printmaking can serve as a vehicle for communicating the causes of mental health challenges and catalyzing social awareness within Kampala District.

Through this research, I am not only to document and analyze my practice but also to validate the therapeutic and communicative power of printmaking as a tool for mental health discourse in Uganda and beyond.

This positionality underscores an ethical commitment to both represent and respect the complexities of mental health causes in community contexts, striving to bridge the gap between individual experience and broader social understanding.

1.11 Definition of Key Terms

1.11.1. Mixed Media Printmaking:

Mixed media printmaking is an artistic practice that combines various printmaking techniques such as relief printing, screen printing, or etching, with unconventional materials including textiles, recycled objects, collage, or natural elements. This approach produces layered, textured artworks that transcend traditional two-dimensional print forms, allowing for enhanced aesthetic complexity and expressive depth (Phillips, 2015; Ross, 2016). Within this study, mixed media printmaking is understood not only as an art form but as a practice-based research method. Workshops conducted in Uganda, including those facilitated by organizations like Faces Up Uganda, show how this medium enables participants to express unspoken emotions and cultivate connection, agency, and well-being (Malchiodi, 2012). Therefore, mixed media printmaking is defined here as a therapeutic and culturally grounded form of print-based art making that explores emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of mental health and well-being within the community.

1.11.2 Mental Health

Mental health refers to a person's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how individuals think, feel, act, and handle stress, relate to others, and make choices (World Health Organization [WHO], 2004). It includes both the absence of mental illness and the presence of positive attributes such as resilience and coping capacity. In this study, mental health challenges refer to common but often unspoken conditions like anxiety, stress, depression, and trauma, particularly as they manifest in everyday Ugandan life. Many individuals may not have clinical diagnoses but experience high emotional burdens due to socio-economic pressures, stigma, or cultural silencing (Bhugra et al., 2013; Kopinak, 2015). This research views mental health as deeply connected to cultural expression and non-verbal healing practices such as printmaking, which provide alternative outlets for emotional release and reflection.

1.11.3 Causes of Mental Health Challenges

The causes of mental health challenges refer to the complex social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors that contribute to or exacerbate psychological distress and emotional difficulties (Bhugra et al., 2013). These include poverty, social isolation, stigma, cultural taboos surrounding mental illness, and urban stressors specific to the Kampala context. This study focuses on how these underlying determinants are communicated and visualized through mixed media printmaking to enhance public understanding and awareness.

1.11.4 Public Awareness

Public awareness in this study denotes the extent to which members of the community recognize, understand, and engage with information regarding the causes of mental health challenges. It encompasses shifts in knowledge, attitudes towards mental health, reduction of stigma, and the fostering of dialogue within Kampala's urban population through artistic communication mediums such as mixed media printmaking.

1.11.5 Textured narratives

This term refers to layered and multifaceted stories or expressions that convey complex human experiences. In this study, textured narratives describe how mixed-media printmaking combines visual, material, and emotional layers to communicate the intertwined social, psychological, and cultural factors influencing mental health in Kampala District.

1.2 Background

The origins of printmaking can be traced to ancient China during the Tang dynasty (7th–10th century CE), when artisans began using woodblock printing to reproduce Buddhist texts and images, laying the foundation for mass communication and the visual dissemination of knowledge (Tsuen-hsuin 1986, Gunaratne 2001). Similarly, (Griffiths 1996) records that early Chinese woodblock printers not only produced religious manuscripts but also pioneered the integration of text and imagery a development that culminated in illustrated publications such as the Dianshizhai Pictorial of the Shanghai Urban Life newspaper, one of the first newspapers to feature both written and pictorial content (Ye 2003). In 2020 Volker further noted that in Japan, the ukiyo-e printmakers of the 17th–19th centuries, including Hokusai and Hiroshige, advanced multi-color woodblock printing as a form of artistic expression that democratized access to art.

Likewise, (Sawyerr, Acquaye et al. 2023) observed that across Africa, surface design traditions such as resist-dyeing, stamping, and block printing on textiles predated European contact, serving communicative and symbolic purposes. Because of these historical developments, printmaking evolved globally as both a technical and cultural process of repetition, transfer, and expression qualities that later influenced artistic practices in East Africa. (Acquaye, Sawyerr et al. 2022) notes that in regions along the Swahili coast, for instance, trade with Arab and Indian artisans introduced block printing and wax-resist dyeing, seen in early kanga and leso fabrics, embedding notions of pattern and reproduction within local aesthetics. It is within this global and regional framework that Uganda's own history of printmaking emerges rooted in indigenous forms of surface decoration and later transformed through missionary printing, academic instruction, and contemporary mixed-media experimentation.

In 2005, Nakazibwe relayed a history of printmaking in Uganda and this paragraph give the researcher's account. Printmaking in Uganda has a deep and evolving history that extends before the arrival of European missionaries and the introduction of the printing press in the late nineteenth century. Long before mechanical reproduction, Ugandan societies developed visual and craft traditions that reflected a sophisticated understanding of surface design, repetition, and pigment transfer principles central to printmaking (see figure 1,2 and 3). Among the Baganda, the production and decoration of barkcloth *(lubugo)* from the inner bark of the mutuba tree (*Ficus natalensis*) stands as one of the earliest and most symbolic examples. Nakazibwe also documents that barkcloth makers in Buganda developed a form of patterned

barkcloth *(embugo entone)* by applying natural pigments through painting and stencilling techniques. The pigment was derived from the leaves of the *muzuukizi p*lant *(Justicia betonica),* mixed with riverbed slip containing iron, which both transferred and fixed the dye to the bark surface. Artisans cut stencils from banana leaves or banana fibres *(olulagala oluwotose ku muliro)* and applied the pigment using their fingers or banana-leaf stalks. Once dried and cleaned, the barkcloth revealed striking geometric motifs stripes, zigzags, crosshatches, and concentric circles painted and stenciled in black as demonstrated in figure 1,2 and 3. Surviving examples in the British Museum and Pitt Rivers Museum date to the nineteenth century and display patterned regularity reminiscent of early printed textiles.

Early observers such as (Pasha 1889) underpin these findings as he notes that these decorated backcloths were reserved for royal wives and princesses of Buganda, underscoring their cultural and symbolic importance. The process of transferring pigment through stencils represents a proto-printmaking technique a deliberate act of repetition, layering, and symbolic communication long before mechanical printing technology arrived.



Figure 1*:* Patterned Bark-cloth from Buganda. 185cm x 197.5cm. Collection of the British Museum, London adopted from (Nakazibwe 2005)



Figure 2*:* Patterned Bark-cloth from Buganda. 210cm x 320cm. Collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford Photo adopted from (Nakazibwe 2005)



Figure 3*:* Patterned bark-cloth from Buganda. 251cm x 202cm. Collection of the British Museum, London Photo adopted from (Nakazibwe 2005)

Other Ugandan communities also practiced forms of surface transfer and impression. Potters from Busoga, Acholi, and Tooro impressed ropes, shells, and woven mats onto wet clay to create repeated decorative textures that conveyed clan identity and ritual meaning (Posnansky 1961). Among the Karamojong (Knighton 2007), body ornamentation during initiation

involved stamping plant-based pigments onto the skin using reeds, carved stems, and gourds, producing rhythmic dot and line patterns. These practices, although not printmaking in the mechanical sense, reveal a strong conceptual continuity: the understanding that marks, when repeated and transferred, could communicate identity, spirituality, and community belonging.

In this sense, barkcloth decoration and other impression-based practices can be seen as the cultural and philosophical ancestors of printmaking in Uganda grounded in repetition, symbolism, and the power of the imprint. The origins of the 1st printing press in Uganda can be traced to the arrival of Alexander Mackay, a Scottish missionary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), who introduced the printing press between 1878 and 1879 (Melrose 1894, Page 2008). This press, likely a wooden Albion hand-proofing press, was assembled at Natete, near Kampala. Mackay used the press primarily to produce religious and educational materials, including his translation of the Gospel of St. Matthew into Luganda. This initiative marked a transformative moment in Uganda's cultural and intellectual history, as it introduced the technology of print media and contributed to early literacy and Christian education.



Figure 4*:* The Wooden Albion Hand-Proofing Press introduced by Alexander Mackay (1878–1879). Currently part of the Uganda Museum's ethnographic collection.

Mackay's pioneering work with the printing press not only advanced communication and education but also laid the groundwork for the development of Uganda's broader visual and artistic culture (Harrison 1892, Melrose 1894).

The formal evolution of printmaking as an artistic discipline in Uganda is closely tied to the establishment of the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Arts (MTSIFA) at Makerere University in the 1930s (Court 1985, Tumusiime 2017). Under Margaret Trowell's leadership, the curriculum emphasized drawing, design, and printmaking as key foundations of visual literacy and creative development.

Trowell herself was a practicing printmaker who used the medium to communicate social values and moral teachings. Her works, such as Mother and Child and Woman in the Village, reflected her interest in community life and the dignity of African women (Tumusiime 2017). Through these, she championed early ideas of women's empowerment and the integration of African cultural identity into visual art.

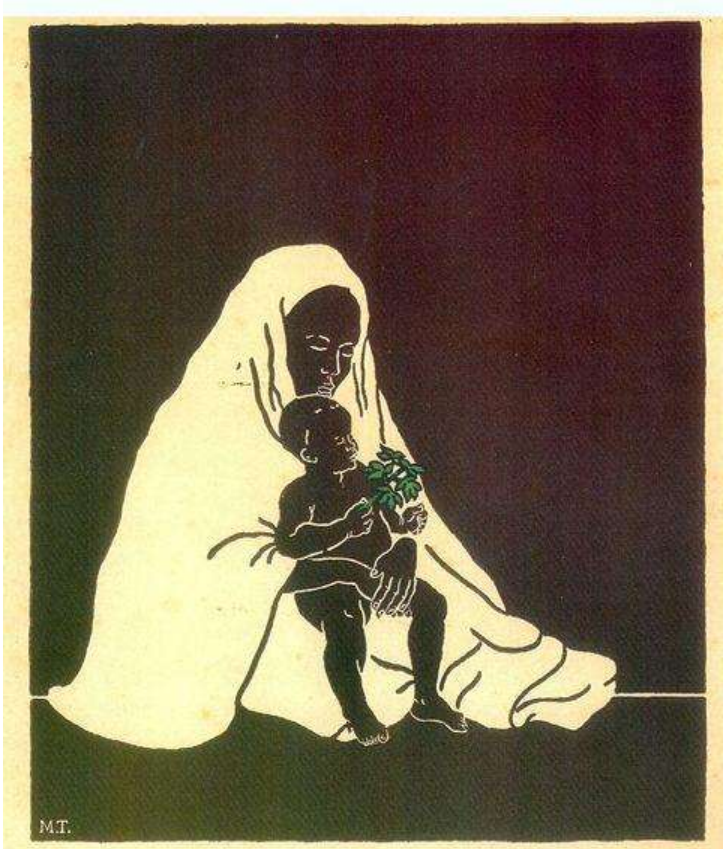


Figure 5*:* Margaret Trowell, "Mother and Child." An example of Trowell's early print work focusing on motherhood and social identity.

Historically, printmaking has been a versatile form of communication used for education, advertising, and political expression. In ancient China, rulers employed printmaking to reproduce official decrees and disseminate messages. In Uganda, similar functions emerged during colonial and post-independence periods, when visual art became a vehicle for national consciousness, cultural pride, and political critique (Kakande 2008). Although digital media now dominates communication, printmaking remains significant because of its tactile quality and its capacity to convey layered, nuanced meaning.

Following Uganda's independence, artists such as Fred Kato Mutebi, Henry Muziri, and Theresa Musoke expanded printmaking from a technical process into a medium of storytelling, cultural documentation, and social commentary (Kakande 2008). Through techniques like linocut, woodcut, screen printing, etching, and collagraph, they captured themes of daily life, spirituality, gender, and community struggles. These artists' works reveal the power of printmaking to narrate social change and to document the evolving identity of post-independence Uganda. Their approach also inspired younger generations to use printmaking as a critical and participatory art form, engaging audiences in dialogue about contemporary issues.

Today, printmaking in Uganda continues to evolve as a space for innovation, communication, and cultural preservation. It bridges the past and present by linking Mackay's early presswork and Trowell's educational vision with the experimental mixed-media practices of contemporary artists who use the medium to explore identity, environment, and social well-being. As a discipline, printmaking embodies layering, repetition, and material hybridity qualities that make it particularly suited to represent complex emotional and social realities. Its tactile and process-based nature allows for both expression and reflection, transforming materials into metaphors for resilience and healing. These intrinsic properties of multiplicity, accessibility, and the capacity for symbolic layering form the basis upon which this study adopts mixed printmaking as an intervention for raising awareness about mental health challenges in Uganda.

Furthermore, the role of visual art in health communication and therapy has been widely recognized in contemporary art practice and community-based health initiatives. Visual art offers a non-verbal channel for expressing psychological distress, reducing stigma, and fostering dialogue about emotional well-being (Malchiodi 2011, Hogan 2015). Within this framework, printmaking becomes a strategic tool for mental health advocacy: its reproducibility enables the dissemination of messages to wider audiences, while its hands-on,

repetitive process can promote mindfulness, focus, and emotional release. This study therefore positions mixed-media printmaking not only as a medium of artistic exploration but also as a creative therapeutic intervention, a means through which artists and communities can engage with the underlying causes of mental health challenges in Uganda.

Mental health has emerged as a critical public health issue globally, with significant social, economic, and cultural impacts across diverse contexts (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). In sub-Saharan Africa, and Uganda specifically, mental health disorders present a growing burden (See figure 6 below). The situation is aggravated by rapid urbanization, limited healthcare resources, cultural stigma, and socioeconomic pressures(Mugisha, Hanlon et al. 2019). Kampala District, as Uganda's most populous urban center, exemplifies these challenges where complex intersections of academic demands, economic struggles, and strained interpersonal relationships intensify mental health vulnerabilities among its residents (Mugisha, Hanlon et al. 2019)

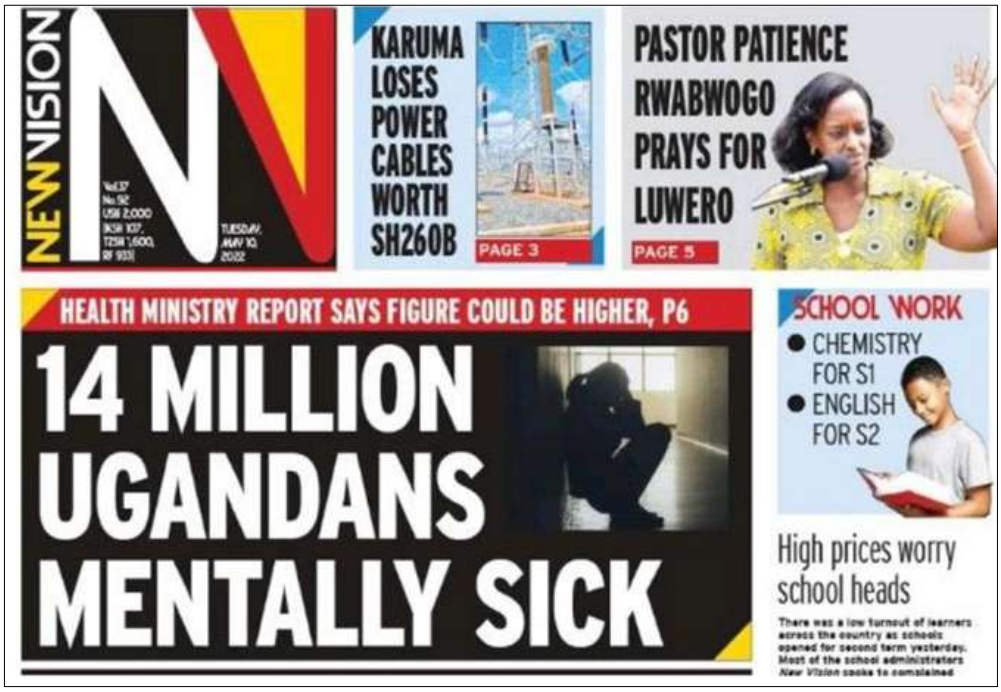


Figure 6*:* New Vision Headline (May 16, 2022) – "14 million Ugandan's mentally sick"

This news headline as shown in Figure 6 *"14 million Ugandans mentally sick"* appeared in New Vision, Uganda's leading national daily, and was part of a broader article authored by a health correspondent concerned about the growing burden of mental health conditions. The article framed mental health as a looming national crisis, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic uncertainty, and rising cases of youth suicides and depression. The author

called for a national mental health strategy and emphasized that Uganda lacked enough mental health professionals, facilities, and public awareness to cope with this "invisible epidemic."

Importantly, the article was not written by a psychiatrist or psychologist but by a public health journalist. This positioning speaks to a significant insight: mental health is increasingly recognized as a public and cultural issue, not just a medical one. The phrase "silent pandemic" provokes an interdisciplinary intervention including educational institutions, families, traditional leaders, and the arts. This reinforces the rationale of this study that mental health needs broader, non-clinical approaches such as artistic engagement that meet people where they are, emotionally, culturally, and geographically.


Growing mental health crisis: Many graduates admitted at Butabika – Dr Nakku

Saturday, February 22, 2025

Figure 7: Daily Monitor Headline (February 22, 2025) – "Growing Mental Health Crisis: Many Graduates Admitted at Butabika – Dr Nakku"

This 2025 headline in Figure 7, from the Daily Monitor features a statement by Dr. Nakku Juliet, a leading mental health specialist at Butabika National Referral Hospital, revealing a troubling trend of increasing mental health cases among university graduates (Daily Monitor, 2025). Her remarks reveal that a significant proportion of those admitted to the national mental health facility are recent university graduates. This pattern underscores the growing psychological burden among Uganda's youth, shaped by economic instability, limited employment opportunities, intense academic competition, and evolving social expectations.

Despite the high prevalence of mental health challenges, stigma and misunderstanding remain widespread in Kampala, hindering open dialogue, help-seeking behaviors, and the implementation of effective mental health interventions (Ssebunnya, Kigozi, & Ndyanabangi, 2009). Globally and regionally, visual arts have been successfully utilized to raise awareness about mental health, break down stigma, and foster empathy (Kent State University Mental Health Exhibit, 2018; Williams, 2024). Exhibitions and community art programs demonstrate how art can humanize the lived experiences of mental illness, encourage dialogue, and catalyze social and psychological healing (MOMAA, 2024). These creative approaches not only educate the public but also empower individuals affected by mental health challenges to share their stories, thereby strengthening social support networks and challenging entrenched prejudices.

In the context of Kampala District's rapidly evolving social landscape, mixed media printmaking holds particular promise as an accessible and impactful communication tool. This thesis investigates how this art form can visually articulate the underlying causes of mental health challenges within the district, evaluates its role in raising public awareness, and explores its potential to serve as a catalyst for advocacy and social change.

Mental health disorders represent a profound and escalating global challenge, recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) as key contributors to disability, reduced quality of life, and economic burdens worldwide. Their prevalence transcends geographic, social, and cultural boundaries, with mental health difficulties affecting one in four people at some point during their lifetime (Bernard, 2021). In sub-Saharan Africa, the burden of mental illness is often underestimated or neglected due to prevailing stigma, inadequate data, and a scarcity of specialized resources (Herman, Kinyanda, Ndyanabangi, & Ovuga, 2020). Uganda stands as a microcosm of these issues, grappling with evolving demographic pressures, rapid urban growth, and socio-political histories that shape mental health outcomes in complex ways (Kigozi, Ssebunnya, Kizza, Cooper, & Ndyanabangi, 2010).

Kampala District, Uganda's administrative and economic hub, exemplifies the multifaceted mental health challenges emerging amid urbanization and socioeconomic volatility. Youth, who form a significant proportion of Kampala's population, face intense pressures from educational systems, economic instability, and shifting social norms, all of which exacerbate psychological distress (Mugisha, Kurbanova, Maling, & Mughisa, 2021; Nakku, Nakku, & Ssebunnya, 2015). These stressors operate within a socio-cultural milieu where mental health conditions remain deeply stigmatized, misunderstood, and often attributed to supernatural causes, further impeding affected individuals from seeking help or articulating their experiences (Ssebunnya, Kigozi, & Ndyanabangi, 2009).

The complexity of mental health challenges in Kampala is underscored by intersections between economic hardships, exemplified by pervasive unemployment and poverty among youth and adults, and the overwhelming expectations placed on individuals in academic and social domains. The pressures to succeed academically in highly competitive environments, coupled with limited vocational opportunities, foster anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness (Mugisha et al., 2021). Simultaneously, strained interpersonal relationships, family dynamics, and social isolation contribute to the psychosocial stressors faced by many residents. Such multifactorial causes highlight the urgent need for culturally appropriate, effective, and empathetic communication strategies that can foster public understanding and dismantle entrenched stigmas.

Traditional mental health communication channels in Uganda are often clinical and diagnostic, missing the nuanced and lived realities of those experiencing mental illness (Nakimuli-Mpungu et al., 2016). Given these limitations, applying creative, community-based, and visual modalities emerges as a strategic avenue for mental health advocacy. Within this context, the visual arts have long been recognized globally as potent tools for social commentary, public engagement, and educational outreach (Belkahla, 2018). Visual mediums can break down language barriers, evoke empathic responses, and render intangible or complex emotional and psychological states into accessible forms (Stokes, 2016). Particularly, mixed media printmaking stands out due to its hybridity: it allows the integration of diverse materials, textures, and imagery, reflecting the layered and often contradictory experiences of mental health challenges. This artistic form can symbolize the complexity and fragmentation often felt by individuals with mental illness, while also allowing room for hope and resilience through creative expression (Williams, 2024). Mixed media's tactile and composite nature makes it

especially appropriate for translating abstract psychological concepts into symbolic visual narratives that can engage diverse audiences beyond academic or clinical settings.

On an international scale, numerous artistic initiatives have effectively employed mixed media and other visual arts to challenge mental health stigma and promote awareness. For example, public exhibitions, community art projects, and art therapy programs have all demonstrated the capacity of creative expression to foster social inclusion and personal healing (Kent State University Mental Health Exhibit, 2018; MOMAA, 2024). Such initiatives validate the idea that art does not merely represent mental health issues but actively participates in reshaping societal attitudes and policies.

In Uganda, while art's role in mental health advocacy is less documented, emerging community-based projects suggest promising beginnings (Mukasa, 2022). These local efforts underscore the cultural relevance of visual storytelling in conveying complex messages about mental health amid communities where verbal communication about psychological distress may be limited by stigma or taboo. Mixed media printmaking, with its versatility and depth, could uniquely resonate within Kampala's dynamic socio-cultural landscape, offering new pathways for dialogue, understanding, and advocacy.

This study, therefore, seeks to contribute to this growing field by examining how mixed media printmaking can visually articulate the root causes of mental health challenges specific to Kampala District. It will explore the medium's efficacy in raising public awareness and reduction of stigma, while considering cultural sensitivities and community engagement. Ultimately, this research aims to illuminate how creative visual arts can form integral components of mental health communication strategies and foster social change within urban Ugandan contexts.

1.3 Problem Statement

In Kampala District, mental health challenges stem from complex social, economic, and cultural factors, including economic hardship, academic pressures, and restrictive societal norms that discourage emotional vulnerability (Opio, Munn et al. 2022, Akena, Kiguba et al. 2023). Cultural expectations, often expressed through phrases like *"be strong" or "keep going,"* further silence those affected, limiting opportunities for open dialogue and understanding. Recent studies (Iversen, Nalugya et al. 2021, Opio, Munn et al. 2022) indicate a growing prevalence of mental health challenges in Uganda, with approximately one in four people

experiencing a mental health condition at some point in their lives. Within the time frame of 2020-2024, these challenges have become increasingly pronounced.

Various art forms such as painting, performance, sculpture, fashion and many others have played a role in raising mental health awareness (Nabulime and McEwan 2011, Ssewanyana 2023) however, when used individually, they often fall short of fully capturing the multifaceted and interconnected causes of mental distress. Each medium tends to emphasize a specific sensory or conceptual aspect, leaving gaps in how audiences interpret or emotionally connect with the broader social realities being addressed.

In contrast, mixed media printmaking combines diverse materials, symbols, and textures, offering a more layered and holistic visual language capable of expressing complex and often invisible experiences. Despite this potential, mixed media printmaking as a communication tool that can be used in raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges remains underexplored in Kampala district. This gap limits the development of culturally relevant, layered and visually engaging approaches to mental health awareness, thereby contributing to continued misunderstanding, stigma and reduced public engagement with understanding the causes of mental health challenges. This is the need for this study to examine how mixed media printmaking can raise awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District

1.4 Purpose of Study

To explore how mixed media printmaking can raise awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District.

1.5 Specific Objectives

1. To identify the contributors to mental health challenges in Kampala District.
2. To analyze how visual art has been used to raise public awareness about health and social issues.
3. To produce mixed-media prints that visually communicate the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of mixed media printmaking as a communication tool for mental health challenges.

1.6 Research Questions

1. What are the contributors to mental health challenges in Kampala District?
2. How has visual art been used to raise awareness on health and social issues?
3. How can mixed media printmaking be used to communicate the mental health challenges in Kampala District?
4. How effective is mixed media printmaking as a communication tool?

1.7 Scope of Study

The scope of a study explains the extent to which the research area was explored in the work and specifies the parameters within which the study was conducted as split below.

1.7.1 Content Scope

The research focuses on mixed media printmaking as an artistic and visual communication form to raise public awareness about the causes of mental health challenges affecting individuals and communities in Kampala District. These causes encompass social, economic, and cultural contributors such as poverty, societal expectations, and culturally embedded printmaking, through its symbolic, tactile, and multilayered qualities, can externalize these complex factors and foster empathy and dialogue within the community.

The study specifically excludes clinical diagnosis, treatment, or psychological intervention. Instead, it emphasizes non-clinical, culturally sensitive communication approaches using mixed media printmaking to promote awareness and social understanding. Other art forms and digital media are outside the scope, as the focus remains on print-based mixed media art within public and community engagement settings.

1.7.2 Geographical Scope

The study was conducted in Kampala District, Uganda, with primary engagement taking place at Harvest International School and Faces Up Uganda which are two organizations that support youth through creative and educational platforms. Harvest International School, located in the Naalya, Kampala, is recognized for its commitment to holistic education and leadership development. Faces Up Uganda similarly provides opportunities for artistic and community engagement aimed at youth empowerment. Kampala District, as Uganda's capital and largest urban center, is characterized by diverse socio-economic and cultural dynamics, rapid urbanization, and prevailing mental health challenges influenced by economic pressures and cultural norms. These distinctive features make Kampala a relevant and representative setting

to explore how mixed media printmaking can function as a culturally resonant communication tool to raise public awareness about the causes of mental health challenges.

1.7.3 Time Scope

This study focuses on the 21st century, particularly the period from the early 2000s to the present. This timeframe captures the growing public discourse on mental health within Uganda and the evolving role of visual art as a medium for social awareness and advocacy. By situating the research within this contemporary era, the study examines how present-day socio-economic conditions, cultural transformations, and artistic practices contribute to shaping perceptions of mental health challenges in Kampala District.

1.8 Significance of the Study

1. Contributes to reducing stigma by creating inclusive spaces for dialogue through artistic engagement.
2. Illuminates the significant role of mixed media printmaking as a visual art communication tool to raise public awareness about social issues and specifically the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District.
3. Promotes the integration of art practice into social communication and advocacy on mental health.
4. Articulates the power of visual expression to represent emotional struggles that are often difficult to articulate verbally.
5. Provides insights that can inform artists, educators, and mental health practitioners seeking creative and culturally sensitive ways to promote mental well-being.
6. Advances the development of printmaking practice and scholarship by extending its application beyond aesthetic production to include socially engaged and therapeutic dimensions. The study situates printmaking as an active medium of research, education, and advocacy, thereby expanding its theoretical and practical scope within contemporary Ugandan art.
7. Adds to the discourse of printmaking by introducing mixed-media approaches that integrate tactile materials, layering, and participatory methods, demonstrating how printmaking can function as a transformative and reflective process. This contribution bridges artistic innovation with psychosocial inquiry, positioning printmaking as both a creative and healing discipline.

1.9 Justification

Mental health challenges have become increasingly critical in Uganda, with Butabika Hospital reporting being overwhelmed by the number of patients admitted.

Many of these are young people and university graduates, reflecting growing distress linked to unemployment, social pressure, and economic instability. The COVID-19 pandemic further escalated these challenges as prolonged isolation and reflection deepened emotional strain and anxiety.

This study is therefore timely, to address this gap by exploring how mixed media printmaking can be strategically used to raise public awareness of the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Pragmatic Theory of Art and the Constructivist paradigm, which together provide a complementary lens for understanding how art can function as a vehicle of inquiry, meaning-making, and communication.

The Pragmatic Theory of Art, advanced by John Dewey (Stroud 2011) in Art as Experience, positions art not as an isolated aesthetic object but as an experiential, socially embedded process that facilitates reflection, dialogue, and transformation. Art in this view is inseparable from lived human experience and gains significance through its capacity to engage individuals in inquiry and foster new ways of perceiving the world. In the context of this study, mixed-media printmaking is not only a creative act but also a communicative practice that brings to visibility the often-unspoken social and emotional causes of mental health challenges. By treating the artwork as an experiential medium, the pragmatic lens foregrounds its role in stimulating public awareness and collective reflection.

Alongside this, the Constructivist paradigm provides the epistemological grounding for the study. Constructivism holds that knowledge and meaning are actively constructed through individual experiences within cultural and social contexts (Allen 1994, Fosnot and Perry 1996). Applied here, it acknowledges that the understanding of mental health challenges in Kampala is shaped by social narratives, cultural practices, and lived realities. This stance validates the

study's focus on symbolic, layered imagery in printmaking as a site of co-constructed meaning between the artist, participants, and audiences.

Together, the Pragmatic Theory of Art and Constructivism provide a robust theoretical foundation. Pragmatism emphasizes the functional, experiential role of art in communication and transformation, while Constructivism underlines the subjective and culturally situated nature of knowledge.

This integrated framework enables the study to critically explore how mixed-media printmaking can serve as a process of inquiry, a form of knowledge production, and a medium for raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges within the Kampala context.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of existing literature related to causes of mental health challenges, with a particular focus on everyday emotional struggles experienced by the population. It further explores the therapeutic potential of mixed media printmaking as an artistic intervention capable of supporting mental health and fostering community engagement. By critically examining current research and identifying gaps, this chapter establishes the foundation and rationale for the present study, which seeks to explore the role of mixed media printmaking in raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala .The review is thematically organized to align with the study's four objectives: (1) to examine contributors to mental health challenges in Kampala District, (2) to analyze how visual art has been used to raise public awareness about social issues, (3) to produce mixed media prints that visually communicate causes of mental health challenges, and (4) to evaluate the effectiveness of mixed media printmaking as a communication tool for awareness..

Mental health challenges in Uganda are often understood narrowly as clinical disorders diagnosed in formal healthcare settings. However, this limited perspective overlooks the widespread and persistent everyday mental struggles experienced by many Ugandans. People may appear physically healthy yet carry deep emotional burdens shaped by poverty, trauma, stigma, and social exclusion. These subtle but profound mental health challenges affect individuals' ability to cope, maintain relationships, and participate fully in community life. Recognizing and addressing this broader spectrum of the causes of mental health is essential to improving public health and social cohesion. This study therefore takes the position that raising awareness and developing support for everyday mental health is as critical as clinical care and must be culturally grounded and accessible. This premise frames the exploration of mixed media printmaking as an innovative and culturally relevant approach to mental health awareness and support in Uganda, Kampala District. Moreover, it argues that such awareness must be culturally resonant and accessible to diverse communities. Mixed media printmaking is thus explored as an innovative and participatory art form with the potential to stimulate dialogue, reduce stigma, and provide new avenues for mental health communication in Uganda. This argument shifts the research focus from exclusively clinical mental health to include the emotional and social realities affecting most Ugandans. It highlights the need for

community-based, creative interventions that resonate with lived experiences beyond diagnostic labels.

2.1.1 Mental Health Challenges in Uganda

Extensive research demonstrates that emotional distress and mental health struggles are widespread in Uganda and are shaped by a range of structural, social, economic, and environmental factors. Nakimuli-Mpungu et al. (2020) estimate that approximately one-third of Ugandans experience symptoms consistent with depression. Vulnerable populations such as refugees (67% prevalence), war-affected individuals (36%), and people living with HIV (28%) experience even higher rates of mental health conditions, often exacerbated by stigma, violence, displacement, and chronic insecurity.

In climate-vulnerable districts, adolescents report elevated levels of anxiety (26.6%) and depression (8.6%) due to environmental instability and lack of psychosocial support (Kaggwa, Tumwesigye, & Musisi, 2021). Similarly, urban populations in Kampala faced increased anxiety (13.2%) and depression (17%) during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating how public health emergencies deepen emotional distress (Mukasa, Namuli, & Muwanguzi, 2021). In Mbarara, psychological distress among school-aged youth was strongly linked to symptoms of depression and anxiety, indicating an urgent need for youth-centred mental health strategies (Okello, Kinyanda, & Musisi, 2019; Katamba et al., 2020).

Post-conflict settings add layers of complexity to mental health challenges. Female sex workers in Gulu experience high levels of major depression related to trauma and social exclusion (Akena et al., 2015). Among people living with HIV in semi-urban Entebbe, food insecurity and exposure to adverse life events significantly correlate with depression (Nakimuli-Mpungu et al., 2014). PTSD symptoms persist among populations in Northern Uganda years after conflict, affecting nearly half of respondents (Roberts et al., 2011). Even healthcare professionals in urban centers such as Mbarara are not immune, suffering anxiety and burnout due to poor work conditions, limited support, and low resilience (Mugisha, Ninsiima, & Kaggwa, 2021).

Mental health literacy in Uganda remains low. Many Ugandans associate mental illness with madness, curses, or spiritual failure, limiting open discussions and help-seeking behavior (Mugisha et al., 2019). Formal mental health services are also scarce there are fewer than one psychiatrist per 100,000 people, and these are mostly concentrated in Kampala and major towns (Nakku, Kigozi, & Ssebunnya, 2016). As a result, rural and marginalized populations are particularly underserved.

These findings underscore that mental health challenges in Uganda extend beyond clinical diagnoses. They are shaped by intersecting forces such as poverty, trauma, gender-based violence, environmental shocks, and stigma. There remains a critical gap in mental health strategies: the absence of accessible, community-based, and culturally relevant support systems for everyday emotional suffering. This gap justifies the exploration of creative and participatory approaches such as mixed media printmaking to promote mental wellbeing and awareness.

2.2 The Therapeutic and Communicative role of Visual Art

Visual arts, including mixed media printmaking, have gained recognition as accessible tools for emotional expression and mental wellbeing support, particularly where formal mental health services are limited. Printmaking provides a nonverbal, embodied medium for externalizing complex feelings safely and creatively, an important advantage in cultural contexts were discussing mental health openly may be stigmatized.

Dean (2015) describes printmaking's reflective qualities, noting that producing multiple prints creates emotional "containment," facilitating safe exploration and regulation of feelings. Morton (2018) highlights how simple printmaking techniques promote spontaneity and bodily engagement, helping participants process emotions and gain insight. Butler (2023) emphasizes printmaking as a "performative art of touch" that physically engages both creator and viewer, enriching emotional communication.

Community printmaking initiatives foster social connection and stress relief by creating shared spaces for creative collaboration and dialogue (Lavoie & Caine, 2022). White (2019) discusses how varied printmaking techniques support group participation and empower individuals with diverse abilities, promoting inclusion. Brollo (2020) metaphorically frames the print matrix as a "womb" for memory and narrative, underlining printmaking's capacity to support personal storytelling and healing. Street (2017) traces printmaking's roots to pre-verbal tactile communication, affirming its deep emotional resonance.

Goerdt (2023) illustrates printmaking's role in expressing cultural identity and highlights its adaptability across contexts. Nursing literature supports using art-making activities like printmaking to improve stress coping, emotional regulation, and group cohesion (Zubala, Kennell et al. 2021). Despite these insights, most research on printmaking's therapeutic value

is rooted in Western or clinical contexts, with little exploration of its relevance and adaptability in Uganda's unique socio-cultural environment. This gap indicates a need to investigate how mixed media printmaking can be culturally adapted to support mental wellbeing and mental health awareness in Ugandan communities.

2.2.1 Mixed Media in Ugandan and African Art Practice

Mixed media art, which combines multiple materials and methods in a single composition, has deep resonance in many African artistic traditions. In Uganda, artists often integrate found objects, natural materials, textile patterns, and symbolic motifs to tell stories that reflect lived experiences, spirituality, and community identity. These hybrid forms echo indigenous practices where visual expression is inherently multidimensional, incorporating music, storytelling, dance, and symbolism.

Contemporary Ugandan artists such as Xenson (Samson Ssenkaaba) and Fred Mutebi use mixed media to comment on social and psychological issues. Xenson's work often incorporates recycled materials, graffiti, and Luganda script to explore urban identity and post-colonial alienation. Fred Mutebi, a renowned printmaker, has led community print workshops that involve youth and rural populations in co-creating visual narratives that reflect their challenges and aspirations.

Organizations such as 32° East, Ugandan Arts Trust, Bayimba Cultural Foundation, and Faces up Uganda provide platforms for participatory and community-based art interventions. While these initiatives rarely focus specifically on mental health, their frameworks demonstrate the power of collaborative art in engaging diverse audiences and reflecting collective realities.

Mixed media, by its very nature, is flexible and inclusive. It allows participants to incorporate personal objects, photographs, natural textures, and cultural motifs making it especially relevant for contexts like Uganda, where storytelling and symbolism are vital communicative tools. Its adaptability makes it well-suited for addressing sensitive topics like mental health, where traditional communication barriers may exist.

2.2.2 Art and Public Health Communication

Art has long played a role in public health communication conveying complex information, challenging stigma, and promoting behavior change. In contexts with low literacy or high stigma, visual and participatory arts can reach audiences in ways that written or verbal messaging cannot.

In Uganda, visual art and drama have been used in HIV/AIDS awareness, family planning, and sanitation campaigns. For instance, the "Straight Talk" campaign successfully used illustrations and storytelling in youth magazines to communicate about sexual health (Kyaddondo et al., 2007). Community mural projects in Gulu and Kampala have been used to address themes of trauma, peace building, and reconciliation.

Art-based awareness strategies draw on visual semiotics, symbolism, and collective memory, making them powerful tools for engaging emotionally with audiences. They also allow for co-creation, where communities shape the messaging, themselves enhancing relevance and trust. Mixed media printmaking, when used in awareness campaigns, can visually depict emotional states, social issues, or cultural metaphors that resonate deeply with viewers. In addition to serving as a personal healing practice, it becomes a public conversation starter. Artworks displayed in community spaces, schools, health centers, or public exhibitions can provoke reflection, discussion, and empathy thus contributing to mental health awareness. However, despite the proven impact of art in other public health domains, its application in mental health awareness in Uganda remains minimal. This gap points to a significant opportunity to apply creative visual communication strategies to destigmatize mental illness Media and Popular Discourse on Mental Health in Uganda.

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping how mental health is understood, discussed, and responded to in Uganda. Beyond academic research, public perceptions of mental illness are often constructed through newspapers, radio, television, and increasingly, digital platforms. These outlets both reflect and reproduce cultural beliefs: at times reinforcing stigma by sensationalizing stories, while in other instances providing crucial spaces for advocacy and awareness. Examining media discourse is therefore essential for understanding the wider ecosystem in which art-based interventions such as mixed media printmaking may operate. media discourse on mental health in Uganda is characterized by three tensions including: 1) Stigma vs Awareness: While some coverage educates, much of it reinforces stereotypes of danger or deviance, 2) Urban vs Rural Reach: Television and print dominate urban centers, while radio reaches rural areas but often avoids framing issues as "mental health." and 3) Novelty vs Depth: Artistic interventions are occasionally reported, but usually framed as cultural curiosities rather than sustained tools for awareness.

2.2.3 Newspaper Coverage between Stigma and Awareness

Uganda's two leading daily newspapers, New Vision and Daily Monitor, frequently report on mental health issues, but their tone varies. A content analysis by Kaggwa et al. (2022) noted that headlines often adopt sensationalist language, framing individuals with mental illness as dangerous or unpredictable for example, stories titled "Mentally Ill Man Attacks Family in Wakiso" (New Vision, 2020) or "Mad Woman Abandons Children on Streets" (Daily Monitor, 2019). Such portrayals reinforce stereotypes that mental illness equals violence or incompetence, contributing to public stigma.

At the same time, newspapers have also served as platforms for public education. Advocacy pieces occasionally highlight the burden of depression, suicide, or substance abuse, especially among youth and professionals. The Daily Monitor (2021), for instance, published an editorial titled "Mental Health Should Be a Public Health Priority", calling for increased government funding and public sensitization. Similarly, New Vision's health supplement has run features on the challenges of accessing psychiatric care at Butabika Hospital, Uganda's national mental referral facility. The dual role of newspapers stigmatizing yet also raising awareness demonstrates their ambivalence as agents of social change. They mirror broader cultural tensions around mental health: a mixture of fear, misunderstanding, and growing recognition of its importance.

2.2.4 Radio and Television Discourses

Radio remains the most accessible medium in Uganda, especially in rural areas where literacy levels are lower. Call-in talk shows often address mental health indirectly through discussions on domestic violence, alcoholism, or suicide but rarely frame these as mental health issues (Mugisha et al., 2019). Religious leaders frequently feature as guest speakers, emphasizing prayer and spiritual healing, which reflects prevailing cultural attitudes but can obscure psychosocial causes.

Television stations such as NTV Uganda and NBS TV have begun integrating mental health awareness into lifestyle and health segments. For example, NTV ran a weekly program called "MEN" discussing the life of men, stress and coping strategies and what it takes to be one. However, such coverage tends to be urban-cantered and may not reach rural populations most in need.

2.2.5 Digital Media and Social Platforms

Social media has emerged as a transformative space for mental health discourse, particularly among youth. Hashtags such as *# Mental Health Awareness UG* on Twitter now referred to as X and Instagram feature testimonies, motivational content, X spaces and Instagram live and links to counseling services. X Live Influencers and organizations like Strong Minds Uganda and Toli Weka use digital platforms to normalize discussions around depression and therapy. At the same time, online spaces are double-edged: while they democratize dialogue, they also expose individuals to misinformation, trivialization of suicide, or insensitive memes about "madness." This mirrors findings from global research, where social media can simultaneously de-stigmatize and trivialize mental health (Naslund et al., 2016).

The rise of digital media has reshaped how art is produced, shared, and consumed. In Uganda as in much of the world, platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok are increasingly central to how artists engage audiences and how conversations about mental health are amplified. For mixed media printmaking, traditionally rooted in tactile and material processes, the digital turn presents both opportunities and challenges: opportunities for wider visibility and engagement, and challenges of accessibility and authenticity. This section examines how contemporary practice in Uganda and beyond integrates digital media into mental health discourse.

2.2.6 Ugandan Artists and Digital Platforms

Ugandan contemporary art has embraced digital spaces as sites of visibility, networking, and activism. Institutions such as 32° East, Ugandan Arts Trust routinely document exhibitions and workshops online, reaching audiences far beyond physical gallery spaces. During the COVID-19 lockdown, when galleries and schools were closed, many artists experimented with online exhibitions and Instagram "studio diaries." These digital interventions indirectly addressed mental health by offering creative solidarity during isolation. For younger Ugandan artists, platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels have become spaces to share short printmaking demonstrations or "art challenges," often tagged with motivational or therapeutic messaging. Yet access remains uneven. Rural artists and communities with limited internet connectivity are often excluded from these digital conversations, reflecting broader digital divides in Uganda (UCC, 2021).

2.2.7 Global Digital Art and Mental Health Campaigns

Globally, digital media has enabled powerful intersections between art and mental health. In the UK, the *#Art4MentalHealth* campaign mobilized artists on Instagram to create works reflecting anxiety and resilience during the pandemic (Lewis, 2021). In the United States, virtual printmaking collectives have hosted online workshops where participants co-create artworks via Zoom, blending tactile processes with digital sharing (Goerdt, 2023).

In African contexts, Kenyan and South African artists have pioneered digital exhibitions addressing trauma and social justice, often curated entirely online to reach diaspora audiences (Mare, 2020). These examples demonstrate how digital media allows printmaking and other art forms to transcend physical limitations, making them accessible to broader and more diverse publics.

2.2.8 Emerging Technologies: Digital Printmaking and AI

Technological innovations are further transforming mixed media practice. Digital printmaking tools now allow artists to combine traditional linocut or collagraph techniques with digital layering, enhancing accessibility for younger, tech-savvy audiences. Some practitioners experiment with AI-generated imagery, which can be incorporated into physical prints, creating hybrid forms of expression. While these tools offer creative possibilities, they also raise critical questions: does digital mediation dilute the tactile, therapeutic qualities of printmaking? Or does it expand its communicative reach? For mental health awareness, the answer may lie in combining both maintaining the embodied, hands-on processes of printmaking while using digital platforms for dissemination and dialogue.

The integration of digital media into printmaking and mental health practice presents a double-edged reality: Opportunities: Broader visibility, interactive campaigns, and international networks can amplify awareness and de-stigmatization efforts. Challenges: Limited internet access, digital literacy gaps, and questions of cultural resonance risk excluding marginalized communities.

For Uganda, where young people are both the most digitally active and the most vulnerable to mental health challenges, leveraging digital platforms is particularly strategic. By combining traditional mixed media printmaking with online exhibitions, hashtags, and digital storytelling, artists can bridge generational and cultural divides.

2.2.9 Media Representations of Art and Mental Health

Although less frequent, Ugandan newspapers and online outlets occasionally report on art exhibitions and community art projects that touch on wellbeing and trauma. The Observer (2019), for instance, covered a community mural project in Gulu aimed at reconciliation and healing after the conflict. Similarly, Daily Monitor (2022) reported on exhibitions at Afriart Gallery addressing themes of identity, memory, and resilience. Such coverage situates art as a communicative medium for difficult conversations. However, reporting tends to highlight the novelty of art practices rather than engage deeply with their therapeutic or awareness-raising dimensions. This underscores the need for scholarly work such as the present study that critically links art to mental health communication.

2.3 Policy Reports on Mental Health in Uganda

While academic literature provides theoretical insights into mental health, NGO reports, government policies, and international agency briefs offer practical perspectives on how mental health is prioritized in Uganda. These documents reveal how global health agendas interact with national strategies and expose gaps between policy rhetoric and lived realities. Critically examining these sources is essential because they influence funding, programming, and advocacy directly shaping the context in which creative interventions such as mixed media printmaking may be mobilized.

2.3.1 Policy Frameworks and the Ugandan Context

The World Health Organization (WHO) has consistently emphasized the need for scaling up mental health services in low- and middle-income countries. The WHO Mental Health Action Plan (2013–2030) calls for integrating mental health into primary care, reducing stigma, and promoting community-based services (WHO, 2021). In line with this, Uganda has made commitments under the East African Community Mental Health Framework to harmonize approaches across the region (EAC, 2019). However, despite Uganda's alignment with these international frameworks, progress remains limited. A WHO assessment noted that Uganda spends less than 1% of its health budget on mental health (WHO, 2020). Most services are concentrated at Butabika Hospital in Kampala, leaving rural populations underserved. This imbalance highlights a structural gap between global aspirations and local implementation.

Locally, Uganda's Mental Health Policy (2000) and the Mental Health Act (2019) mark significant milestones. The Act emphasizes human rights protections, community-based care,

and integration with primary healthcare (Government of Uganda, 2019). However, scholars argue that implementation has been slow due to inadequate funding, workforce shortages, and weak monitoring systems (Ssebunnya et al., 2021).

Reports by the Ministry of Health indicate that Uganda has fewer than 50 psychiatrists for a population of 45 million, with most based in Kampala (Ministry of Health, 2021). Counseling services are even scarcer, and mental health units in general hospitals remain poorly resourced. This shortage means that prevention, awareness, and early intervention strategies such as art-based community engagement are crucial complements to formal care. In addition, several NGOs have stepped into this gap, offering community-driven approaches. A case of, 'Strong Minds Uganda' specializes in group talk therapy for depression, particularly targeting women. Reports show that participants not only experience improved mental health but also economic empowerment through renewed motivation (Strong Minds, 2022).

TPO Uganda (Transcultural Psychosocial Organization) runs psychosocial support programs for refugees and war-affected populations in Northern Uganda. Their reports highlight the effectiveness of culturally sensitive trauma interventions, but also note scalability challenges (TPO, 2020). Basic Needs UK in Uganda previously piloted community mental health programs that integrated livelihood support with treatment, showing that economic stability and mental health are intertwined (BasicNeeds, 2017). These NGO models demonstrate that participatory, culturally grounded approaches are effective. However, they often depend on donor funding and remain localized. Importantly, none of the reviewed NGO reports highlight the role of visual arts, despite global evidence of their potential in trauma recovery and awareness raising. A recurring theme across policy and NGO reports is the mismatch between policy rhetoric and practical delivery. While the Mental Health Act promises rights-based, decentralized care, most Ugandans continue to lack access to services. NGOs provide innovative interventions but are constrained by limited reach and donor dependency.

Another gap is the absence of sustained public awareness campaigns. Whereas HIV/AIDS once benefited from consistent government-media partnerships, mental health campaigns are sporadic and underfunded. Policy documents rarely address stigma directly, yet NGO reports consistently identify it as a barrier. The gap suggests that new approaches particularly those capable of reaching communities in accessible and culturally resonant ways are urgently

needed. Art-based interventions, including mixed media printmaking, can complement formal programs by translating abstract policy goals into tangible community dialogues.

The review above, induced the emergence of three critical insights including: Structural Gaps Limited funding and workforce shortages mean Uganda cannot rely solely on biomedical interventions; Promise of Community-Based Models: NGO-led psychosocial programs show that participatory and culturally adapted strategies can succeed where formal systems fall short And Missed Opportunities in Awareness: Despite progress in policy frameworks, there is little focus on public education and cultural engagement.

As such, the absence of visual arts in these reports underscores the originality of this study. By exploring mixed media printmaking as both a communicative and therapeutic tool, the research positions itself at the intersection of policy aspirations (community-based stigma reduction) and practical innovation (accessible, culturally resonant awareness strategies).

2.4 Global Case Studies of Printmaking in Mental Health

While Uganda's art-mental health nexus remains underexplored, other regions have documented how printmaking and mixed media art function as tools for healing, memory, and public awareness. Examining these case studies provides comparative perspectives, highlighting strategies that may inspire or be adapted for the Ugandan context. Four key examples South Africa, Zimbabwe, Chile, and Indigenous Australia illustrate the global potential of printmaking in psychosocial recovery and advocacy.

2.4.1 South Africa: Printmaking and Post-Apartheid Trauma

South Africa provides one of the most significant examples of printmaking as a vehicle for collective healing. During and after apartheid, artists such as William Kentridge and Diane Victor used printmaking to interrogate violence, memory, and identity (Croucamp, 2015). Community print studios like the Artist Proof Studio in Johannesburg offered spaces where survivors of violence could process trauma through collaborative art-making.

Research indicates that such workshops not only produced striking visual records of apartheid's legacies but also functioned as psychosocial support systems (Rankin-Smith, 2011). Participants engaged in dialogue, storytelling, and reflection while producing prints, making art both an expressive outlet and a communal act of resilience. The South African case demonstrates how printmaking can bridge personal trauma and collective history, fostering dialogue where words may fail.

2.4.2 Zimbabwe: Print and Textile as Social Commentary

In Zimbabwe, artists have integrated traditional textile and batik techniques with printmaking to comment on political and social instability. Organizations such as the BAT Workshop in Harare encouraged young artists to address issues of poverty, displacement, and repression through print-based media (Vansina, 2010). More recently, women's cooperatives in Bulawayo have used screen-printing and fabric design workshops as income-generating and therapeutic spaces. Reports suggest that these initiatives provided not only financial resilience but also psychological relief by enabling women to transform personal struggles into collective visual statements (Nyathi, 2018).

Zimbabwe's experience illustrates how printmaking, when tied to economic empowerment, can simultaneously support mental wellbeing and community cohesion an insight particularly relevant to Uganda, where poverty and unemployment are key stressors.

2.4.3 Indigenous Australia: Printmaking and Cultural Identity

In Indigenous Australian communities, printmaking has been embraced as a culturally appropriate art form for identity affirmation and mental health resilience.
Workshops organized in Arnhem Land and Central Desert communities integrate traditional motifs, stories, and symbols into modern printmaking techniques (Morphy, 2016).

These initiatives provide safe spaces for intergenerational exchange, where elders transmit cultural knowledge while youth engage in creative expression. Scholars argue that the act of embedding Indigenous narratives into prints strengthens cultural pride and provides psychosocial benefits in contexts marked by colonization, dispossession, and high suicide rates (Caruana, 2019). The Indigenous Australian case demonstrates the adaptability of printmaking to diverse cultural settings, showing how local materials, stories, and symbols can ground therapeutic practice in community identity, a lesson directly applicable to Uganda's rich cultural traditions.

Across these case studies, several themes emerge: 1) Collective Healing: Whether in South Africa or Chile, printmaking fosters shared spaces for processing collective trauma, 2) Economic and Social Empowerment: Zimbabwean cooperatives show how art can link mental wellbeing with livelihood support, 3) Cultural Grounding: Indigenous Australian practices highlight the importance of embedding art therapy in local cultural narratives, 4) Resistance

and Advocacy: From Chile to South Africa, printmaking functions as both therapy and activism, amplifying marginalized voices.

Compared to Uganda, these contexts demonstrate more explicit linkages between art and mental health. However, they also confirm the universality of printmaking's therapeutic and communicative power, strengthening the rationale for exploring its adaptation to Uganda's mental health landscape. The global examples reviewed here show that printmaking is not only an artistic practice but also a social technology for healing, memory, and resistance. Yet in Uganda, this potential remains largely untapped. By critically examining the role of mixed media printmaking in raising awareness about mental health, the present study positions itself as both innovative and timely drawing inspiration from global precedents while responding to local cultural and social realities.

Conclusion

Although mental health challenges in Uganda are well documented and printmaking is recognized globally for its therapeutic potential, several critical gaps remain. First, there is a notable absence of research examining mixed media printmaking specifically within Uganda's mental health and cultural landscape. Existing studies do not sufficiently address how printmaking can be culturally adapted to reflect indigenous narratives and social realities, making it more relevant for stigma reduction and healing.

Second, there is limited empirical evidence measuring the effectiveness of printmaking-based interventions in low-resource, high-stigma settings like Uganda, particularly those using participatory, community-driven approaches involving vulnerable populations such as refugees, youth, and trauma survivors.

Third, the combination of printmaking with other artistic media to expand expressive possibilities and accessibility remains underexplored, as does the role of printmaking in improving mental health literacy and reducing stigma through nonverbal communication.

Finally, innovative applications of technology within mixed media printmaking interventions tailored to Uganda's context have not been documented, representing an important frontier for future research. Existing art therapy models are often Western-based and insufficiently adapted to Uganda's symbolic and material culture. These gaps justify this study's focus on

investigating mixed media printmaking as a culturally grounded, participatory and empirically validated approach raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Uganda. Filling these gaps will advance understanding of creative arts' role in mental health promotion and offer practical pathways for community-based interventions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework guiding the study, including the research design, area of study, data collection methods, and analytical procedures. The study is situated within a qualitative approach and is primarily shaped by Arts-Based Research (ABR), which legitimizes artistic practice as a form of systematic inquiry. Through ABR, mixed-media printmaking is not only employed as an expressive medium but also as a research tool for exploring and communicating the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District.

The methodology is informed by the Pragmatic Theory of Art and the Constructivist paradigm. The Pragmatic Theory of Art emphasizes art's social function and its capacity to provoke reflection, dialogue, and action within specific cultural contexts. Constructivism complements this stance by framing knowledge as co-created through experience, interaction, and interpretation. Together, they provide the epistemological foundation for the methodological choices, situating art-making as both a communicative act and a collaborative meaning-making process.

3.2 Research Design

Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) describe a research design as a plan that guides the researcher in collecting, analysing, and interpreting empirical observations. It provides a logical structure that enables the researcher to make interpretations and draw conclusions about the relationships within a study. In addition, the study was grounded within an exploratory and interpretive qualitative framework, as it sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the causes of mental health challenges and how these can be communicated through mixed-media printmaking. The exploratory nature of the study was appropriate given the limited research on the use of mixed-media printmaking as a communication tool for mental health awareness in Kampala District. The interpretive dimension enabled a focus on participants' subjective experiences, meanings, and visual expressions rather than measurable variables. The study was not intended for statistical generalization but rather for analytical and contextual understanding, consistent with qualitative and Arts-Based Research approaches. This research adopted an Arts-Based Research (ABR) design, which positions artistic practice as both a method of inquiry and a mode of representing knowledge. Rather than treating art solely as a product, ABR views

creative processes as a way of exploring and communicating complex human experiences that may not be fully captured through traditional textual or numerical approaches (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2015).

The ABR approach was chosen because the study sought to understand and communicate the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala through the expressive and interpretive potential of mixed-media printmaking. Unlike quantitative designs that prioritize measurement or phenomenological approaches that focus solely on textual accounts of lived experience, ABR expands the possibilities of inquiry by integrating visual, symbolic, and multisensory dimensions.

This allows for an exploration of meaning that is both reflective and communicative, creating outputs that can engage participants and audiences in dialogue and critical reflection (Rolling, 2010; Leavy, 2017).

In this design, data collection occurred in natural and participatory settings, where participants contributed their perspectives through dialogue, creative workshops, and collaborative reflection. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions provided narrative accounts of experiences, while participatory workshops encouraged participants to engage with symbolic materials, imagery, and collaborative creative processes. Participant observation further enriched the inquiry, as the researcher documented interactions, visual choices, and collective meaning-making that occurred in the creative sessions. This blending of conventional qualitative methods with artistic processes ensured that data was both experiential and reflective.

ABR also relies on an iterative and interpretive process of analysis, where the meanings embedded in narratives and artistic outputs are examined together. In this study, participants' stories and insights were analysed alongside the symbolic layers of visual artworks produced during workshops and studio practice. Rather than separating artistic outcomes from research data, ABR treats them as integral to knowledge generation. The process emphasized both the co-construction of meaning and the potential of artworks to provoke new insights when shared with wider audiences (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

By cantering creativity, symbolism, and collaborative meaning-making, ABR enabled the study to capture not only what participants said about the causes of mental health challenges

but also how they represented and communicated these realities through visual forms. This integration honored participants' voices, cultural context, and expressive agency, while also producing artworks that served as communicative tools to challenge stigma and promote public reflection. Ultimately, the ABR design provided a holistic, human-centred, and culturally situated approach to exploring mental health challenges in Kampala, bridging the gap between lived experience, research inquiry, and artistic representation.

3.3 Area of Study

This study was conducted in Kampala District, Uganda, the country's capital and largest urban center. Kampala is characterized by a diverse socio-economic landscape, a large youth population, and significant mental health challenges shaped by economic pressures, social expectations, and cultural stigma. These factors create a complex environment where mental health issues are often under-recognized and misunderstood, making Kampala a relevant context for exploring innovative mental health communication strategies through artistic media.

The primary engagements for this research took place at Harvest International School and Faces Up Uganda, two organizations that provide vital platforms for youth development through creative education and community empowerment. Harvest International School, located in Naalya, Kampala, is a Christian international school committed to holistic education, leadership development, and nurturing the potential of every student. Its environment offers access to a diverse student body and staff, making it an ideal setting for exploring mental health awareness in an educational context. Meanwhile, Faces Up Uganda is a community-based organization focused on empowering urban youth through arts, education, and dialogue. It provides opportunities for participatory printmaking workshops and serves as an important space for engaging young people with mental health topics in a culturally sensitive and creative manner.

3.4 Study Population and size

The study engaged both purposive and random sampling to capture a wide range of perspectives on how mixed-media printmaking can communicate the causes of mental health challenges in Uganda. These categories included:

- Students and staff from Harvest International School

- Youth participants from Faces Up Uganda Community Centre
- Boda-boda riders and poets, representing public and creative community voices
- Members of the general public who interacted with the artworks through the online exhibition and survey.

Through collaboration with Faces Up Uganda, the study engaged directly with youth both at the community center and in selected schools located in Masanafu and Namungoona, urban suburbs of Kampala, Uganda.

These locations were chosen for their dense populations, diverse socio-economic settings, and accessibility to youth-cantered programs. The institutions that participated included:

- Masanafu Secondary School
- Masanafu Progressive Secondary School
- Namungoona Progressive Secondary School
- Kigobe Primary School
- Faces Up Uganda Community Centre

While the core participants were purposefully selected from these institutions and workshops, additional voluntary participants from the general public were reached through the online exhibition survey. These participants offered feedback voluntarily, thereby broadening the scope of perspectives beyond the immediate workshop and school environments. Participants were included in the study based on their willingness to engage in discussions related to mental health and involvement in workshops. Individuals who did not consent to take part in the study were not involved in the study activities.

Gaining access to participants was facilitated through institutional collaboration. At Harvest International School, permission was obtained through the school administration, while at Faces Up Uganda, program coordinators acted as gatekeepers, introducing the researcher to participants.

To increase the sample size, **snowball sampling** was employed, where initial participants were asked to refer to other participants who were willing and had related knowledge to mental health to contribute to the study.

This inclusion enriched the study's understanding of how mixed-media printmaking communicates mental health themes across diverse social and experiential backgrounds.

Participants from the schools and the Faces Up Uganda Centre were **purposively selected** for their relevance to the study's focus on youth and creative engagement. In contrast, boda-boda riders were randomly selected to ensure diversity and reduce selection bias. This combination of purposive and random sampling enhanced the representativeness of the study and provided a balanced view of how mixed-media printmaking can raise awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in urban Ugandan contexts. Similarly, the participants from Harvest International School were randomly selected to ensure representativeness and reduce selection bias. The school population consists of approximately 300 students and about 50 staff members, who were considered appropriate for providing diverse and valuable insights into mental health challenges and the communicative role of mixed media printmaking.

Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination formula for finite populations, appropriate sample sizes were calculated to balance statistical validity with practical considerations. For the student population (N = 300), a sample size of 169 (S = 169) was selected, while for the staff population (N = 50), a sample size of 44 (S = 44) was derived. This formula reflects the relationship between population size and sample size, increasing at a diminishing rate and stabilizing for larger populations, as detailed in Table 1 below.

N	*S*	*N*	*S*
10	10	220	140
15	14	230	144
20	19	240	148
25	24	250	152
30	28	260	155
35	32	270	159
40	36	280	162
45	40	290	165
50	44	300	169

Table 1: Determining sample size for a finite population, for (n 50 and 300)

The use of random sampling ensured an unbiased selection process, capturing a broad cross-section of the school community. This approach provided sufficient depth and breadth of data to explore the complexities surrounding mental health contributors and the effectiveness of mixed media printmaking as a communication tool within the school environment. While Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula was used to guide sample size determination within the

school population, the final sample was shaped by the qualitative nature of the study. As such, emphasis was placed on relevance and depth of engagement rather than statistical representation.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Multiple data collection methods were employed to gather comprehensive and diverse information related to the study objectives. The following tools were utilized to capture qualitative insights. These tools included library research, questionnaires, interviews, observation and studio practice-arts based research.

3.5.1 Library and Archival Research

A comprehensive review of relevant literature was conducted to contextualize the study within existing knowledge on mental health in Uganda, the role of visual art as a communication tool, and social practice art. Sources included academic journals, government health policies, and media reports from major Ugandan outlets such as *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor*. These materials provided insights into prevailing mental health challenges including prevalence, societal impacts, and interventions as well as the potential of artistic and participatory approaches to raise awareness and foster community engagement around mental health issues.

3.5.2 Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires were used to gather data on participants' experiences and perceptions of mental health challenges. These instruments captured demographic information, the prevalence of mental health concerns such as stress, anxiety, and depression, perceived contributing factors, barriers to accessing support, and participants' suggestions for improving mental wellbeing. The use of both closed and open-ended questions allowed for consistency in responses while also providing space for personal expression.

3.5.3 Studio Practice and Artistic Production

The data collection through studio practice was grounded in an Arts-Based Research (ABR) framework, which positions artistic creation as both a process of inquiry and a means of generating knowledge(Leavy 2020) . Within this framework, the researcher employed mixed-media printmaking as a methodological tool to explore, interpret, and communicate mental health themes identified during field engagement. The ABR approach emphasizes embodied understanding, reflective making, and creative expression as valid forms of data collection and analysis, allowing the creative process to function as a site of meaning-making and discovery.

The studio work was directly influenced by the researcher's experiences as a participant-observer during the workshops conducted with Faces Up Uganda. These workshops provided firsthand insights into how young people express, interpret, and respond to issues surrounding mental health through creative activities. The interactions, discussions, and artworks generated in these sessions became a critical foundation for the conceptual and visual direction of the studio production.

Drawing from these lived experiences, the researcher then transitioned into the studio to translate field-based observations into visual form, using artmaking as a reflective extension of social inquiry.

A series of mixed-media prints were produced in response to the mental health themes that emerged from both the fieldwork and participant reflections. The hands-on process incorporated techniques such as carving, drawing, icing technique, collage, and woodblock printing, through which emotional and psychological experiences were visually explored. Each stage of creation was systematically documented including artistic decisions, material choices, and thematic developments to provide qualitative insights into how artistic practice can reflect and interpret complex social realities.

In this context, the studio practice functioned as both a creative and analytical process, where experimentation, reflection, and visual expression contributed directly to the research findings. This approach aligns with the ABR premise that art making serves as a mode of investigation, enabling deeper engagement with issues such as identity, vulnerability, and resilience in relation to mental health within Ugandan communities.

3.5.4 Observation

Observation was adopted as a key data collection method in this study to document behaviors, interactions, and contextual dynamics within the workshop environments of participants during workshops and their engagement with mixed media artworks. Following (Lynch 1990), observation is understood as the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artefacts within a social setting. This approach enabled the researcher to document both verbal and non-verbal responses, interactions, and contextual elements that could not be fully captured through questionnaires alone.

In this study, the researcher employed the Observer as a Participant role, where participants were aware of the researcher's presence and objectives, but interaction was kept minimal to preserve authenticity (Zikmund, D'Alessandro et al. 2014). This allowed the researcher to gather firsthand insights into how individuals interacted with the artworks and workshops while maintaining neutrality.

To ensure systematic recording, the AEIOU framework (Activity, Environment, Interaction, Object, User) was used as a guiding tool:

1. **Activity** – Documenting actions and behaviors of participants, such as how they engaged with printmaking processes, responded to prompts, or expressed ideas about mental health through art.
2. **Environment** – Recording the setting, atmosphere, and general mood of the workshop space and exhibitions, including factors that influenced participant comfort and engagement.
3. **Interaction** – Observing exchanges between participants, as well as between participants and artworks, to understand how dialogue and collaboration shaped meaning-making.
4. **Object** – Paying attention to the materials, tools, and artworks produced, as these embodied both creative processes and communicated messages about mental health.
5. **User** – Profiling participants in terms of demographics, attitudes, and levels of engagement to better interpret how different groups experienced the artworks.

Observations were documented see (Appendix 6 and 7) through field notes, photography, and short video clips, which were later organized into categories using the AEIOU framework. This method provided a deeper contextual understanding of the study and reinforced the phenomenological design by emphasizing lived experience and meaning construction.

3.5.5 Online Public Feedback Survey

An online public feedback survey was conducted following the presentation of mixed-media artworks through a digital exhibition. Participants were invited to evaluate the effectiveness of the artworks in communicating mental health themes using a Likert scale, as well as to provide open-ended responses interpreting the artworks and their impact.

3.5.6 Semi Structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed as a primary qualitative data collection method to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of mental health challenges, as well as their engagement with mixed-media artworks. This approach allows for a flexible, in-depth exploration of topics while maintaining a consistent set of guiding questions across participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Unlike fully structured interviews, semi-structured interviews enabled participants to articulate personal insights, narratives, and reflections in their own words, creating opportunities for rich, contextual data.

Semi-Interviews were conducted face-to-face, during the workshops and the questioner distribution. Each session lasted approximately 30–60 minutes with the help of an interview guide designed to explore participants' understanding of mental health, their engagement with artworks, and the perceived effectiveness of visual art in communicating complex social issues. The guide included open-ended questions, prompts, and follow-up probes to encourage detailed responses while allowing participants to introduce topics of personal relevance.

Recording and Data Management

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and supplemented with handwritten notes capturing non-verbal cues, contextual observations, and immediate reflections. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, anonymised, and organised using qualitative data management software to facilitate coding and thematic analysis. Reflective notes were also maintained to document the researcher's interpretations, assumptions, and insights during the interview process.

3.5.7 Fieldwork Schedule and Engagement

The fieldwork for this study was conducted between July 2024 and September 2024 through a series of structured outreach programs and creative workshops. School outreach activities included introduction to print making, practical session on Stancel and wood block printing were carried out in institutions including Namungoona Kigobe Primary School, Masanafu Secondary School, Namungoona Progressive Secondary School, Excell Secondary School Kawempe, and St. Florence Secondary School Kasubi. These sessions typically took place in the afternoons and involved interactive discussions and participatory art activities centered on mental health awareness.

In addition to school-based engagements, a holiday program was conducted, incorporating a range of creative sessions such as printmaking, illustration, storytelling, photography, and art for psychosocial support. These sessions were designed for different age groups and facilitated collaborative learning and expression.

Each engagement involved the introduction of mental health themes, guided creative activities, group discussions, and reflective sessions. Data was documented through field notes, photography, and video recordings, allowing the researcher to capture both verbal and non-verbal expressions as well as the evolution of artistic outputs.

3.6 Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis to interpret the qualitative data collected from questionnaire surveys, semi structured interviews and audience feedback. Thematic analysis, as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involves a systematic process of identifying, coding, and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning within a dataset. This method was appropriate for the study's constructivist orientation, as it enabled the researcher to understand how participants' experiences and perceptions of mental health challenges were socially constructed and expressed through artistic communication. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached, that is, the point at which no new themes or insights were emerging from participants. This was evident through the repetition of participant responses and recurring visual and thematic elements within the artworks.

The process of analysis followed several stages. First, the researcher became familiar with the data through repeated reading of the questionnaire responses and listening to audience feedback. Second, initial codes were generated to capture relevant features of the data. Third, related codes were grouped into broader categories and potential themes were identified. Fourth, themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the dataset. Finally, the themes were defined and named, forming the analytical categories that guided the discussion of findings.

These themes directly informed the conceptual development and visual elements of the mixed-media prints, ensuring that the artworks were firmly grounded in participants lived experiences and perceptions. Visual data analysis was also undertaken by examining the artworks themselves. This involved a close reading of the materials, textures, colors, and symbolic choices employed in the prints, with attention to how these design elements communicated

ideas about mental health. Through this process, the researcher interpreted the emotional tones, social messages, and cultural references embedded in the artworks, thereby highlighting the communicative capacity of printmaking in raising awareness.

3.6.1 Data Quality Control

To enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, the study employed strategies of data quality control consistent with qualitative research standards. Triangulation was a central approach, achieved by comparing and cross-verifying data from different sources namely, questionnaire, surveys, audience feedback, and visual analysis of the mixed-media artworks. This ensured that interpretations were not based on a single source but were supported across multiple forms of evidence (Flick, 2002; Wilson, 2014).

The researcher also maintained reflexive field notes to document observations, analytic decisions, and personal reflections during the research process. This provided an audit trail that enhanced the dependability of the analysis. Peer debriefing was sought from colleagues in the academic and artistic community, who reviewed the coding framework and thematic categories to reduce potential bias.

Additionally, credibility was strengthened through member-checking practices during workshops, where preliminary interpretations were shared with participants to verify whether the themes resonated with their perspectives. This participatory validation ensured that the analysis honored the voices and experiences of respondents while maintaining transparency in how findings were constructed.

Together, these quality control measures increased the trustworthiness, scope, and depth of the study, ensuring that the thematic analysis and visual interpretations accurately reflected the complex realities of mental health communication through mixed-media printmaking.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards and protocols of research ethics to ensure the protection of participants' rights and wellbeing. Ethical clearance was obtained from relevant institutions, and permission to conduct the study was secured from participating organizations including Harvest International School and Faces Up Uganda Supporting

documentation, including consent forms and institutional approval letters, are provided in the appendix page 105.

It was necessary to seek consent from all the participants who agreed to take part in the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. For participants who fell below the age of eighteen, informed assent was obtained alongside consent from their guardians or responsible authorities. All the participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw their participation at any time, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. However, participants who were comfortable with recordings, to disclose their faces consented to the process. Participants' identities were protected through the use of pseudonyms, and no identifying information was included in reports or visual documentation. Sensitive discussions related to mental health were handled with care, and participants were not compelled to disclose detailed personal experiences.

3.8 Limitations

While the study makes significant contributions to understanding how mixed-media printmaking can be used to raise awareness of the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District, several limitations were noted.

The study was therefore limited in its ability to incorporate a wider demographic range, such as older community members, policymakers, or additional stakeholders in the mental health sector because the research activity was limited to one year of the master's study.

Additionally, the study did not directly engage mental health professionals such as psychologists or community health workers. This aspect in some way may have limited clinical interpretation of mental health. However future studies to incorporate this interdisciplinary perspective were recommended.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented the methodological framework that guided the study, highlighting the integration of Arts-Based Research (ABR) within a constructivist and pragmatic paradigm. Focused on a qualitative methodology where an Arts-Based Research (ABR) design, research design was applied to gain an in-depth view and understanding perceptions of individuals

concerning the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District. The study, therefore, situated mixed-media printmaking as both an artistic and investigative process to provide insights, attributes, and comprehension into the central phenomenon, while highlighting how personal narratives and creative expression intersect in raising awareness.

Similarly, a range of methods and tools for data collection and analysis were discussed, including semi-structured interviews, participatory workshops, observation, questionnaires, studio practice, and archival research.

These approaches complemented one another in generating a multifaceted dataset, while thematic and visual analyses offered systematic strategies for identifying recurring patterns and interpreting the symbolic, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of the artworks. Ethical considerations and research limitations were also presented, demonstrating the measures taken to safeguard participants while acknowledging the practical constraints that shaped the study.

Further, this chapter connects to the following chapter (Findings, Discussions and Analysis), which presents a thoughtful insight into the themes that emerged from the research. It analyses the findings and interprets cultural signs, symbols, and visual strategies within the mixed-media prints, showing how they function as communicational avenues for raising awareness of mental health challenges in Kampala District.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the findings of the study, drawing on data generated through qualitative and Arts-Based Research (ABR) methods outlined in Chapter 3. The study employed questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, participatory workshops, observation, and studio-based artistic practice to explore how mixed-media printmaking can raise awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District.

Guided by a constructivist paradigm and the Pragmatic Theory of Art, the findings are interpreted as co-constructed meanings emerging from both verbal narratives and visual expressions. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns across the dataset, while visual analysis enabled interpretation of symbolic and material elements within the artworks.

In line with Arts-Based Research, artistic outputs are treated not as illustrations but as integral forms of data and knowledge production. Therefore, this chapter presents findings through an integration of participant narratives, observational insights, and visual artworks.

The chapter begins with a contextual overview of participants lived realities, followed by findings organized according to the study objectives, and concludes with an evaluation of the effectiveness of mixed-media printmaking as a communication tool. The findings must be understood within the socio-economic and cultural context of Kampala, where rapid urbanization, youth unemployment, academic competition, and strong social expectations shape everyday experiences. Participants in this study, particularly students and urban youth, operate within environments characterized by financial instability, performance pressure, and limited access to mental health support systems.

These conditions contribute to a context in which mental health challenges are often internalized, stigmatized, or expressed indirectly. As a result, creative platforms such as participatory workshops and visual art become important spaces for expression, reflection, and communication.

4.1 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: OBJECTIVE 1:

Contributors to mental Health challenges in Kampala District.

To examine the contributors of mental health challenges in Kampala District, this section presents findings derived from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, participatory workshops, and observational field notes, analyzed through thematic analysis as outlined in Chapter 3. The themes represent recurring patterns identified across both verbal narratives and visual expressions. The findings reveal that mental health challenges in Kampala arise from a web of social, economic, academic, and cultural pressures that overlap and reinforce one another. These pressures manifest through emotional distress, anxiety, social withdrawal, and at times, substance dependence reflecting both individual struggles and broader systemic realities. The analysis highlights how daily life experiences ranging from academic competition and financial hardship to social judgment and gendered expectations collectively shape mental wellbeing. To interpret and visually communicate these interconnected factors, the researcher developed a mind map (Figure 8) that synthesizes the key findings.

The mind map serves as both an analytical and creative framework, illustrating how personal experiences, societal expectations, and environmental conditions intersect to influence mental health. This visual synthesis mirrors artistic processes such as mood board construction, transforming abstract data into a tangible representation of the lived realities behind the study.

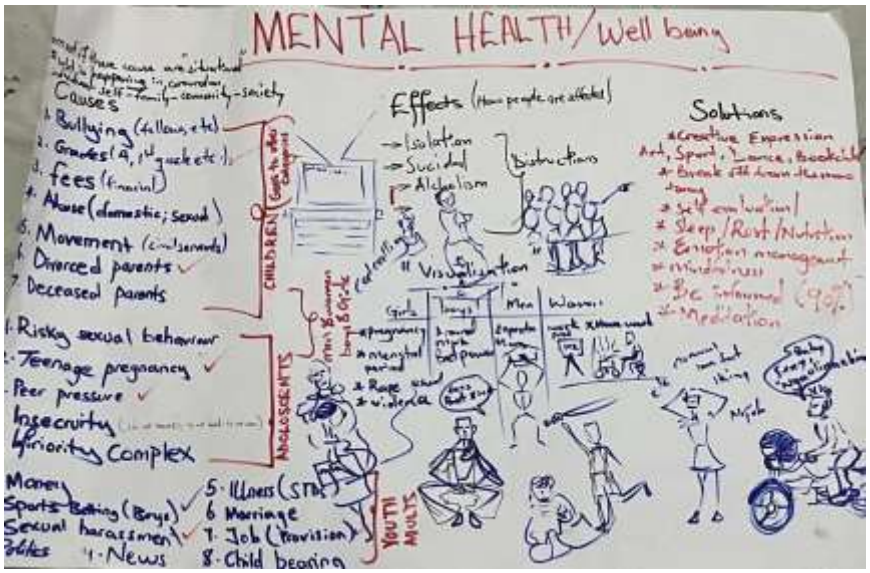


Figure 8: Mind Map Showing Causes /Effects /Solutions to Mental Health.

The mind map (Figure 8) was developed to summarize and visually organize the findings on the causes, effects, and possible solutions to mental health challenges across different age groups in Kampala District. This visual framework emerged from a synthesis of information gathered through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, field observations, participatory workshops, and library and archival research. The mind map was not merely a summary tool but a visual thinking process that allowed the researcher to explore how interconnected factors contribute to mental distress. It serves both as a form of data visualization and as an analytical model, enabling one to trace the ripple effects of a single cause through personal, familial, and social layers of experience.

The mind map is structured around three main components: causes, effects, and solutions connected through visual cues, text, and sketches that represent age-specific and gender-inclusive mental health realities. The causes identified from the questionnaires and later confirmed through workshops and interviews include academic pressure, family conflict, bereavement, financial strain, peer pressure, unemployment, social media influence, and risky sexual behavior.

Each of these causes is positioned on the map with connecting arrows that illustrate their consequences, showing how one challenge can trigger another. For example, the loss of a parent may lead to grief and instability at home, which in turn may cause academic decline, feelings of neglect, and eventual social isolation or vulnerability to peer pressure. Similarly, a young adult who graduates but cannot find employment may face financial strain, family disappointment, and internalized feelings of inadequacy that manifest as anxiety, depression, or dependency on substances. These links on the map reflect how mental health challenges are cumulative and interrelated rather than isolated occurrences.

The mind map also highlights the possible solutions and coping mechanisms that participants suggested in response to these pressures. These include creative expression, emotional regulation, social support, physical activity, and meditation, alongside calls for improved access to counselling, community awareness, and the need to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health. By connecting these suggestions to the causes and effects, the mind map becomes a space where distress and recovery are visually and conceptually intertwined, emphasizing that mental health is both an individual and collective process.

Beyond its structural function, the mind map operates as both a research instrument and a creative model. It transforms written data into a visual dialogue in which causes and effects are not fixed categories but shifting movements that interact and evolve. The arrows, words, and sketches create a mental image of how distress travels through one's life and environment, revealing that mental health challenges are often chains of experience that unfold over time. For instance, figures representing women balancing multiple roles office work and house work, motherhood, and domestic responsibilities illustrate how gendered expectations compound stress and limit emotional freedom.

This method of visual mapping aligns with constructivist theory, which suggests that meaning is constructed through personal and social interpretation. By translating abstract data into visual form, the mind map enables both the researcher and the audience to see connections that are otherwise difficult to express in words alone. It also resonates with pragmatic theory of art, where the value of an artwork or visual representation lies in its practical and experiential impact its ability to engage, clarify, and communicate lived realities. In this sense, the mind map functions as an experiential interface, allowing the researcher to understand emotional realities not only through reading responses but also through seeing and feeling the relationships between them.

An important insight that emerged from the mind map was the recurrence of cross-cutting causes that transcend age, gender, and social class. Economic hardship, family instability, and social judgment appeared consistently across participants of different groups, suggesting that mental health challenges in Kampala are both systemic and cyclical. Economic pressure, for instance, affects both youth seeking jobs and parents struggling to provide for them. Social judgment influences adolescents navigating identity formation and adults pressured by expectations of success. Family instability impacts children's emotional development and continues to shape relational behaviors and trust in adulthood. These intersections point to broader social structures, economic inequality, cultural expectations, and inadequate support systems that sustain cycles of psychological strain.

The mind map therefore stands as more than an analytical summary; it also became a source of narrative inspiration for the visual artworks that followed in the study. The process of mapping ideas allowed the researcher to identify emotional and symbolic correspondences and to transform verbal data into visual metaphors.

Through this interplay, the mind map served as a bridge between research and creative practice, demonstrating how visual thinking can deepen our understanding of complex social and emotional realities.

Ultimately, the mind map became both evidence and expression, a space where research and art converge to communicate what statistical or textual data alone cannot. It visualizes the flow of human experience from cause to effect and back toward resolution, offering an embodied and interpretive understanding of the mental health challenges affecting individuals and communities in Kampala District.

Five thematic contributors emerged prominently from the data:

1. Academic Pressure
2. Time Pressure and Societal Expectations
3. Economic Pressure and Financial Instability
4. Public Opinion and Social Judgment
5. Concealed Emotional Struggles and Gendered Suppression

Each theme is elaborated upon through voices from the field, supported by theoretical concepts and relevant literature.

In the Ugandan context, mental health remains largely an unspoken or misunderstood phenomenon often silenced by cultural norms, normalized by survivalist language, or masked through euphemisms. Psychological suffering frequently escapes clinical vocabulary and instead blends into the textures of daily life.

A participant from Masanafu expressed this reality poignantly:

"It's like we are all carrying something heavy, but pretending it's not there. We call it life."

Goffman's (1963) theory on stigma and the presentation of self explains how societies manage individuals who deviate from perceived norms through labeling and social categorization. Such labeling often leads to concealment or trivialization of distress, as individuals attempt to maintain social acceptance. In the Ugandan context, this process is linguistically reinforced through colloquial expressions such as yawunga (disoriented), zavako (on-and-off), and mawire (erratic). These terms are frequently used with humor or dismissal rather than empathy or clinical concern. This linguistic framing reflects a sociocultural mechanism of stigma

management, where mental or emotional instability is normalized or mocked instead of being recognized as a sign of distress. Consequently, the language surrounding mental health contributes to a cultural environment in which psychological suffering is hidden, misinterpreted, or trivialized, leading to delayed or avoided help-seeking behaviors.

4.1.1 Academic Pressure

Academic pressure emerged as a significant contributor to mental health challenges among participants, as evidenced across questionnaire responses, semi-structured interviews, and workshop observations. Within the Ugandan context, education is widely perceived as the primary vehicle for upward mobility, with academic success heavily emphasized across socio-economic classes. Students, particularly first-generation university-goers, face immense pressure to excel academically as a means of transforming their family circumstances. This societal value system often translates into chronic anxiety, sleeplessness, and emotional burnout.

During the semi-structured interviews, a Makerere University student expressed this sentiment:

"I can't fail. I'm the first in my family to reach university. There's no room for mistakes."

This narrative reflects how educational attainment is positioned as a collective investment, where failure carries both personal and social consequences. Similarly, responses from the questionnaires revealed that academic pressure was among the most frequently mentioned causes of stress. Several participants reported feelings of guilt when unable to meet expectations, with one respondent noting:

"My parents sacrificed everything for my tuition, so I can't rest even when I'm exhausted."

Another added that constant comparisons with high-performing peers caused *"fear of failure and self-doubt,"* while others described physical symptoms such as headaches and loss of appetite during exam periods. These issues compounded the notion that academic pressure among young people is a contributor to mental health challenges.

Observations from the art works created from the art-based workshops further reflected similar struggles. Many participants created visual expressions centered on books, clocks, or confined spaces symbols that suggested time pressure and academic burden. The discussions that followed revealed how students associate education with both hope and emotional strain, as

success is tied not only to personal achievement but also to family and community expectations.

(Nsereko, Musisi et al. 2014) similarly identified heightened psychological distress among Ugandan university students, underscoring how academic and familial expectations contribute to mental fatigue. Taken together, the findings indicate that while education remains a powerful pathway to social mobility, it also becomes a major source of distress when linked to survival and collective aspiration. Overall, the findings suggest that while education is widely regarded as a pathway to opportunity and social transformation, it simultaneously becomes a source of psychological strain when linked to high expectations, limited support systems, and the pressure to succeed on behalf of others.

4.1.2 Time Pressure and Societal Expectations

Cultural scripts surrounding life milestones such as completing school, securing employment, marrying, owning property, or bearing children are deeply ingrained within Ugandan society. Missing these milestones often invites public scrutiny and internalized shame. For instance, the common phrase *"When are we eating cake?"* typically directed at unmarried individuals is a culturally coded inquiry into delayed marriage that, while seemingly humorous, often triggers emotional distress and feelings of inadequacy.

Data from the semi-structured interviews revealed that several participants, particularly women, felt intense anxiety about societal timelines. One respondent shared,

"*People keep asking when I'll get married. It makes me feel like I'm failing, even when I'm doing well in other areas."*

This highlights how societal expectations extend beyond personal aspirations and become internalized measures of success. Similarly, another participant noted that, "being seen as jobless at 30 makes people look at you like you're lazy or unserious," revealing how age-based expectations intersect with economic roles, particularly around masculinity and financial responsibility. These narratives suggest that societal timelines are not neutral but carry moral judgments that can negatively affect self-perception.

The questionnaire further reinforced these findings. A significant number of participants cited "pressure to meet family and social expectations" as a key stressor.

Many described comparing themselves to peers who had achieved visible milestones, leading to feelings of stagnation and diminished self-worth. This comparative framework intensifies psychological pressure, as individuals measure their progress against socially constructed timelines rather than personal circumstances.

Observations from the art workshops further reflected these tensions. Participants' artworks frequently included imagery of clocks, unfinished roads, or fragmented human figures symbols (see figure 29) interpreted as representing the pressure of time and incomplete journeys. In line with the Arts-Based Research approach outlined in Chapter 3, these visual representations function as both expressive and analytical forms of data, capturing affective dimensions of experience that may not be fully articulated through verbal responses. The recurrence of time-related symbols across different participants suggests a shared cultural understanding of success as time-bound and sequential.

Collectively, these findings show that cultural expectations surrounding success and adulthood contribute to time-related anxiety and self-blame. Even individuals making steady progress often feel perpetually behind, suggesting that mental distress in this context stems not merely from personal shortcomings but from societal constructs of achievement and worth. This suggests that mental health challenges in this context are not solely the result of individual circumstances but are deeply embedded within social constructs of achievement, adulthood, and worth.

4.1.3 Economic Pressure and Financial Instability

Economic pressure and financial instability emerged as a major contributor to mental health challenges among participants, as evidenced across questionnaire responses, semi-structured interviews, and workshop observations. Within Kampala's urban context, many young people navigate environments characterized by high living costs, unstable household incomes, and limited financial security. For students in particular, educational participation is often shaped by ongoing economic uncertainty, which extends beyond the classroom into their emotional and psychological well-being Questionnaire findings revealed that "financial pressure" was among the most frequently cited causes of distress. Students commonly mentioned delayed or partial payment of school fees, lack of scholastic materials, and uncertainty about continuing their studies. One respondent wrote:

"*Sometimes I'm sent home for fees and I feel like giving up because I know my parents are already trying their best."*

This reflects not only material deprivation but also a deep sense of emotional burden, where students internalize their families' financial struggles. Another participant highlighted the broader impact of economic instability on concentration and mental focus: *"Our land is being sold because of debts, and it makes me think too much; I can't even concentrate in class."* Such responses indicate that financial stress is not experienced in isolation but is closely linked to anxiety, cognitive distraction, and reduced academic engagement.

Insights from semi-structured interviews further revealed how these economic concerns permeate participants' daily lives. Several respondents described persistent worry about school fees and household finances, often leading to sleep disturbances, social withdrawal, and heightened emotional distress. In some cases, participants avoided interactions with peers due to embarrassment about their financial situation, suggesting that economic hardship also carries a social and psychological dimension. Observational data from participatory workshops provided additional evidence of how financial instability is experienced and expressed. Participants frequently produced visual imagery such as empty wallets, cracked piggy banks, and incomplete or roofless houses (see Figure 32). These symbols functioned as metaphors for loss, vulnerability, and instability. Group discussions revealed that such imagery represented both the realities of their families' economic struggles and the pressure they felt to succeed academically as a means of overcoming these challenges. In line with the Arts-Based Research framework outlined in Chapter 3, these visual outputs serve as both expressive and analytical forms of data, capturing the emotional weight of financial insecurity in ways that extend beyond verbal articulation. The recurrence of similar symbolic representations across participants suggests a shared experience of economic precarity within the study context.

Collectively, these findings indicate that financial instability significantly impacts students' mental health by generating chronic stress, emotional fatigue, and feelings of hopelessness. Economic hardship not only disrupts educational continuity but also shapes how individuals perceive their future possibilities. In this context, the pressure to achieve academic success is closely tied to economic survival, reinforcing a cycle in which financial insecurity and psychological distress are deeply interconnected. Observations from the art workshops reflected similar anxieties. Many students created drawings that incorporated empty wallets, cracked piggy banks, or houses without roofs as visual metaphors of loss and instability. Group

reflections revealed that these images represented both their families' struggles and the burden they felt to "make it" through education.

Collectively, these findings highlight how economic precarity affects students' mental health. Financial instability not only disrupts learning but also fosters chronic stress, emotional fatigue, and hopelessness. For many young people, economic survival overshadows psychological well-being, creating a silent but persistent form of distress tied to family debt, unpaid fees, and the fear of losing property or opportunity.

4.1.4 Public Opinion and Social Judgment

Public opinion and social judgment emerged as significant factors influencing how young people experience and respond to mental health challenges. Data drawn from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and workshop observations indicate that fear of stigma and the need to maintain a socially acceptable image often lead individuals to suppress their emotional experiences. Within many Ugandan communities, expressions of sadness, anxiety, or vulnerability are frequently interpreted as weakness, lack of resilience, or even insufficient faith, discouraging open engagement with mental health issues.

Questionnaire responses revealed that several students avoided sharing personal challenges due to fear of being judged or misunderstood. One respondent wrote,

> *"If you talk about stress, people say you're overreacting or you don't pray enough."*

Another student added,

> *"At school, when someone cries or looks sad, others laugh or say you're being dramatic."*

This indicates that social media amplifies existing pressures by creating environments where emotional authenticity is discouraged, and visibility is tied to performance. As a result, individuals may experience a disconnect between their internal emotional states and their external representations, contributing to feelings of isolation and inadequacy.

Observational data from participatory workshops provided visual insight into these experiences. Participants frequently produced imagery such as half-smiling portraits, masked figures, or divided facial expressions (see Figure 22). These visual elements symbolized

concealment, dual identity, and the tension between public appearance and private emotion. During group reflections, participants described these works as representing *"hiding pain to look strong" and "pretending to be happy so people don't talk."*

Consistent with the Arts-Based Research framework outlined in Chapter 3, these visual representations function as both expressive and analytical data, revealing emotional complexities that may not be fully articulated through verbal responses. The recurrence of masking and concealment imagery across participants suggests a shared social experience of managing perception in order to avoid judgment.

Collectively, these findings indicate that public opinion and social judgment both in physical and digital spaces play a critical role in shaping how young people engage with mental health challenges. The expectation to appear resilient or socially successful discourages help-seeking behaviors and reinforces emotional repression. This creates a condition in which individuals perform stability in public while privately experiencing anxiety, self-doubt, and loneliness, highlighting the broader social dimensions of mental health within the Ugandan context.

4.1.5 Concealed Emotional Struggles and Gendered Suppression

Cultural emotional struggles, particularly among male participants, emerged as a significant theme across questionnaire responses, semi-structured interviews, and workshop observations. Within the Ugandan socio-cultural context, dominant constructions of masculinity often discourage open emotional expression, promoting ideals of strength, resilience, and self-reliance. From an early age, boys are socialized to associate vulnerability with weakness, reinforcing patterns of emotional suppression as a socially acceptable norm.

Data from semi-structured interviews revealed that male participants frequently experienced pressure to conceal distress and manage challenges independently. One respondent reflected:

"If a boy shows he's sad, people say he's soft. So, you just keep quiet."

This response illustrates how emotional restraint is socially enforced, shaping how young men interpret and respond to psychological distress. A similar sentiment was expressed by a secondary school teacher, who noted:

"I would rather drink and forget. What can cry change?"

Such perspectives suggest that emotional suppression is not only internalized but also normalized across different age groups, often leading individuals to adopt avoidance strategies rather than seek support.

Questionnaire findings further highlighted gendered differences in help-seeking behavior. While both male and female participants reported experiencing stress and anxiety, fewer male respondents indicated willingness to speak to teachers, counsellors, or peers. This pattern reflects broader trends identified by global health research, including findings from World Health Organization (2022), which link restrictive gender norms to reduced help-seeking behaviors among men and increased vulnerability to adverse mental health outcomes.

Observational data from participatory workshops provided additional insight into how emotional suppression is expressed visually. Male participants often produced minimalistic or abstract compositions characterized by dark tones, enclosed figures, or limited symbolic detail (see Figure 30). Some explicitly stated that they *"did not know how to draw feelings,"* suggesting both a lack of expressive vocabulary and discomfort with emotional articulation. In contrast, female participants tended to engage more openly with emotional themes, using color, figurative imagery, and symbolic representation to depict experiences of sadness, anxiety, and hope.

In line with the Arts-Based Research framework outlined in Chapter 3, these visual differences are significant as they reveal gendered patterns of emotional processing and communication. The contrast between restrained and expressive visual forms suggests that while emotional distress may be similarly experienced across genders, its expression is shaped by socially constructed norms and expectations.

Collectively, these findings indicate that emotional suppression among young males is both culturally learned and socially reinforced. While silence is often framed as a sign of strength and control, it carries psychological costs, including isolation, unresolved stress, and limited access to support systems. Addressing these challenges requires not only increasing awareness but also creating culturally sensitive spaces where vulnerability can be expressed without fear of judgment or social stigma.

Case Illustration: The Hidden Crisis behind a Jovial Face – John Babirukamu

The story of John Babirukamu, a prominent Ugandan digital marketer who died by suicide in 2024 powerfully illustrates the tension between outward appearance and internal suffering. Just

days before his death, John was seen pitching projects, socializing, and maintaining an energetic persona.

In his final message, he wrote:

"I feel empty. I'm sorry for being an inconvenience in life and death."

His family later revealed that he had been silently battling depression and had a drawer full of antidepressants. Despite financial stability and recent professional achievements, he was overwhelmed by invisible pain. His death sparked widespread conversations on mental health, with calls for empathy, support systems, and national awareness campaigns.

4.2 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS OBJECTIVE TWO.

How has visual art in Uganda been used to raise awareness of social issues, including Mental Health

To analyze how visual art has been used to raise public awareness about social issues, this section presents findings from objective two. With a research question, how has visual art been used to raise awareness on social issues? Drawing from global, African, and Ugandan experiences, this analysis explores how artists and organizations have mobilized visual art as a form of communication, resistance, education and healing. The analysis incorporates library and archival research, alongside reflections from audience engagement, workshop participation, and online exhibition feedback. The review of literature, practice, and responses is organized thematically to reflect how visual art has been used as a social practice and a method of engaging public consciousness, particularly around health, gender, identity, and mental well-being. The structure and approach follow an interpretive and arts-based research framework, aligning with the methodology of this study.

Ugandan Artists and Organizations in Social Art Practice

This section presents a selection of Ugandan artists and organizations whose practices directly address social issues. Through varied mediums sculpture, printmaking, fashion, portraiture, mural work, and mixed media these practitioners confront challenges such as HIV/AIDS, gender inequality, cultural stigma, environmental degradation, and mental health.

4.2.1 Dr. Lilian Nabulime – Sculpture as Dialogue on HIV/AIDS



Figure 9: Male and Female, Sculptures; by Lilian Mary Nabulime 2004.

Dr. Lilian Nabulime (born 22 December 1963) is a Ugandan born sculptor and retired senior lecturer of fine art at Makerere University. Her artistic practice demonstrates how sculpture can function as a tool for public health communication and social dialogue. Her work Male and Female (2004) (see Figure 10) employed soap a familiar material associated with cleanliness and personal care to create sculptural representations of male and female genitalia. The choice of soap was significant because it connected everyday experience with discussions surrounding sexuality, hygiene, and HIV/AIDS prevention.

Rather than presenting HIV/AIDS through medical information alone, Nabulime translated the issue into a visual and tactile form that audiences could engage with directly. By using recognizable materials and simplified symbolic imagery, the work reduced barriers of fear, discomfort, and stigma often associated with conversations about sexual health. The sculptures therefore functioned not merely as aesthetic objects but as communicative devices that encouraged reflection, discussion, and learning.

An important aspect of Nabulime's practice is its emphasis on audience participation. The work created opportunities for dialogue among community members, particularly women and young people who are often excluded from public discussions surrounding sexuality and reproductive health. In this way, awareness was generated through interaction and conversation rather than through one-directional messaging.

Nabulime's approach illustrates how visual art can transform sensitive social issues into accessible forms of public engagement. Her practice demonstrates that symbolism, material choice, and audience interaction can be used to challenge silence and stimulate collective reflection. This insight is particularly relevant to the present study, which similarly seeks to use visual language and symbolic imagery within mixed-media printmaking to create awareness around the causes of mental health challenges in Uganda.

4.2.2 Fred Kato Mutebi – Printmaking for Civic and Health Education



Figure 10: Ensobi Yaani (Who is to Blame?) by Fred Kato Mutebi.

Fred Kato Mutebi (1967) is Ugandan print maker. Mutebi creates works that carry social and political messages as well as rely on anecdotes and stories to capture those messages.

Fred Kato Mutebi's practice demonstrates how printmaking can function as a powerful medium for public education, civic engagement, and social awareness. Through his woodcut prints and community-based initiatives, Mutebi has consistently used visual art to encourage critical reflection on social, political, and health-related issues affecting Ugandan communities. Fred Kato Mutebi has consistently used woodcut printmaking as a medium for civic engagement and public health awareness

His multi-colour woodcut print *Ensobi Yaani (Who is to Blame?)* (see Figure 11) addresses questions of responsibility in relation to poverty, disease, conflict, and environmental degradation. Rather than providing direct answers, the work invites audiences to critically reflect on the underlying causes of these challenges and their implications for society. Through symbolism and visual storytelling, the print transforms complex social concerns into accessible visual narratives capable of engaging diverse audiences beyond individual artworks; Mutebi's contribution to social awareness is particularly evident through the *Let Art Talk* initiative. According to Batson (2011), the programme engages community members in creating visual narratives around issues such as sanitation, land rights, malaria prevention, domestic violence,

and democratic participation. Through workshops and collaborative printmaking activities, participants become active contributors rather than passive recipients of information.

This participatory approach is significant because it positions art as a process of dialogue and collective meaning-making. By involving communities in the creation of visual messages, Mutebi encourages local ownership of social narratives while creating opportunities for discussion and reflection. The resulting prints are often exhibited in public spaces, allowing important social messages to reach audiences regardless of literacy level or educational background. Mutebi's practice demonstrates that visual art can raise awareness not only through representation but also through participation. The effectiveness of his work lies in its ability to combine visual communication, community engagement, and public accessibility. Through this process, printmaking becomes both an educational tool and a platform for democratic expression.

The relevance of Mutebi's approach to the present study is particularly significant. His use of printmaking workshops as spaces for dialogue and reflection supports the methodological framework of this research, which similarly employs participatory art practices to explore social issues. While Mutebi focuses on civic and public health concerns, the present study extends these principles to the field of mental health awareness. His work demonstrates how print-based processes can create opportunities for communities to reflect upon lived experiences, communicate shared concerns, and engage with issues that are often difficult to discuss openly (Batson 2011). The practices of Nabulime and Mutebi demonstrate two complementary approaches to awareness-raising through visual art. While Nabulime employs symbolic sculptural forms to stimulate dialogue around health-related stigma, Mutebi emphasizes participatory printmaking as a means of community education and collective reflection. Together, their work illustrates that visual art raises awareness most effectively when audiences are actively engaged in processes of interpretation and discussion.

4.2.3 Taga Nuwagaba – Documenting Cultural Identity and Environmental Issues



Figure 11*:* Taga Nuwagaba shows of one of his paintings which he has used to teach the public about totems

Taga Francis Nuwagaba is a Ugandan water color painter famously known for his wild life and human figure paintings. Taga Nuwagaba's artistic practice demonstrates how visual art can function as a tool for cultural education and environmental awareness. Through realist watercolor painting, he documents aspects of Uganda's cultural heritage and natural environment, transforming visual representation into a means of preserving knowledge and stimulating public reflection.

One notable aspect of his work is his documentation of Ugandan clan totems (see Figure 12). Through detailed depictions of animals and cultural symbols associated with different clans, Nuwagaba visually communicates knowledge that is increasingly at risk of being lost through modernization and changing social structures. His paintings therefore serve not only as artistic expressions but also as educational resources that help audiences understand the cultural significance of totems in shaping identity, belonging, and social cohesion.

Beyond cultural preservation, Nuwagaba's work also addresses environmental concerns. His representations of wildlife, landscapes, and indigenous cultural practices encourage viewers to reflect on the relationship between people, culture, and the natural environment. By visually

documenting traditions and ecosystems under pressure from urbanization and environmental degradation, his paintings draw attention to the consequences of cultural and ecological loss.

According to Nagawa and Nuwagaba (2024), his exhibitions are intentionally designed to reach diverse audiences through presentations in schools, galleries, and community spaces. This outreach strategy is significant because it extends the educational role of art beyond conventional exhibition settings and creates opportunities for dialogue among young people and local communities. In this way, awareness is generated not only through the artworks themselves but also through the spaces and conversations they create.

Nuwagaba's practice illustrates how visual art can preserve cultural memory while simultaneously encouraging critical reflection on contemporary social and environmental challenges. His work demonstrates that awareness-raising is not limited to activism or advocacy alone but can also occur through education, documentation, and the transmission of cultural knowledge.

This perspective contributes to the present study by demonstrating how visual symbols and culturally familiar imagery can be used to communicate complex ideas to diverse audiences. While Nuwagaba's work focuses on cultural identity and environmental stewardship, the present research similarly employs visual language and symbolic representation within mixed-media printmaking to stimulate reflection on the social causes of mental health challenges. Both approaches highlight the capacity of visual art to generate understanding, dialogue, and community engagement through culturally relevant forms of communication.

The practices of Nabulime, Mutebi, and Nuwagaba demonstrate different but complementary approaches to awareness-raising through visual art. Nabulime employs symbolic sculpture to address health-related stigma, Mutebi utilizes participatory printmaking to promote civic engagement and public education, while Nuwagaba focuses on cultural preservation and environmental consciousness through visual documentation. Despite differences in medium and subject matter, all three artists reveal that awareness is most effective when visual art connects social issues to lived experience and creates opportunities for public reflection and dialogue.

4.2.4 Dr. Sarah Nakisanze – Textiles and Participatory Fashion for Social Sustainability



Figure 12*:* Nakisanze Sarah's, Past Traditions artwork (2020): An Inclusive Livelihood Resource (Photo by Hector Mutebi Mulwana)

Dr Sarah Nakisanze is a fashion designer, educator, and researcher from Kampala, Uganda, known for her work with indigenous materials, particularly barkcloth, in eco-product design.

Dr. Sarah Nakisanze's practice demonstrates how textile art and participatory fashion can be used to raise awareness about social sustainability, cultural identity, and community empowerment. Through the integration of indigenous materials, collaborative production processes, and symbolic visual forms, her work illustrates how visual art can communicate social concerns while simultaneously preserving cultural knowledge.

Her project *Past Traditions: An Inclusive Livelihood Resource* (2020) (see Figure 13) utilized materials such as barkcloth, raffia, banana fibres, basketry, and recycled fabrics to create experimental textile artworks and garments. These materials were not selected solely for aesthetic purposes; rather, they carried cultural, historical, and social meanings that connected audiences to indigenous knowledge systems and traditional livelihoods. Through this

approach, the artworks encouraged reflection on the value of cultural heritage within contemporary society.

A significant aspect of Nakisanze's practice is her emphasis on participation and collaboration. The project involved artists, tailors, and women from marginalized communities in the creation of the garments, transforming the artistic process into a platform for inclusion, skills development, and shared storytelling. By involving participants directly in the production of the work, the project generated awareness not only through the finished artworks but also through the collaborative experiences that shaped them.

Nakisanze further employed symbolic forms and culturally recognizable motifs to communicate ideas relating to productivity, resilience, belonging, and continuity. The use of basketry structures, organic forms, and references to traditional craftsmanship enabled audiences to engage with issues of sustainability and cultural preservation through familiar visual languages. In this way, the artworks functioned as both aesthetic objects and educational tools capable of stimulating discussion about social and economic challenges facing contemporary communities.

The awareness-raising potential of Nakisanze's work lies in its ability to connect cultural heritage with present-day concerns. Rather than presenting sustainability as an abstract concept, her practice demonstrates how traditional knowledge, local materials, and community participation can contribute to more inclusive and resilient futures. The work therefore positions art as a means of preserving cultural memory while encouraging critical engagement with issues of livelihood, identity, and social development.

Nakisanze's approach is particularly relevant to the present study because it demonstrates how materials themselves can become carriers of meaning. Her use of culturally significant materials and participatory processes provides an important model for this research, which similarly employs mixed-media approaches to communicate complex social issues. While her work focuses on sustainability and community empowerment, the present study uses mixed-media printmaking to raise awareness about the causes of mental health challenges. Both approaches highlight how artistic materials, symbols, and collaborative practices can facilitate dialogue, reflection, and public engagement.

The practices of Nuwagaba and Nakisanze demonstrate how awareness can be generated through the preservation and reinterpretation of cultural knowledge. While Nuwagaba uses painting to document cultural identity and environmental concerns, Nakisanze employs textile art and participatory fashion to explore sustainability, inclusion, and resilience. Both artists show that visual art can function as a form of cultural education, enabling communities to engage with contemporary challenges through familiar symbols, materials, and traditions. Their work expands the understanding of awareness-raising beyond activism by demonstrating how cultural heritage itself can become a catalyst for reflection and social dialogue.

4.2.5 Robert Ssewanyana – Participatory Art for HIV/AIDS Awareness



Figure 13*:* Some of the HIV awareness and prevention messages engraved on furniture at an exhibition by Mr. Robert Ssewanyana at the Makerere Art Gallery, MTSIFA, CEDAT, Makerere University, and Kampala Uganda.

Dr. Sewanyana Robert, PhD, is an applied sculptor and academic at Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. He serves as a Lecturer in the Margaret Trowel School of Industrial and Fine Art (MTSIFA), under the College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (CEDAT), where he has taught since 1999.

Dr. Robert Ssewanyana's research and artistic practice demonstrate how participatory visual art can be used as a tool for health education, community engagement, and social transformation. His work on HIV/AIDS awareness illustrates how art can move beyond representation to become an active process through which communities examine challenges, share experiences, and develop collective responses.

One notable aspect of his practice is the incorporation of HIV/AIDS awareness messages into everyday functional objects such as engraved furniture (see Figure 14). By embedding educational content within familiar items, Ssewanyana extends the reach of visual communication beyond traditional gallery spaces and into everyday social environments. This approach increases accessibility and enables awareness messages to become part of daily interaction and reflection.

Central to Ssewanyana's research was the use of participatory workshops that combined visual art, dialogue, and performance. Rather than positioning audiences as passive recipients of information, these workshops encouraged participants to become active contributors in exploring issues related to HIV prevention, stigma, and responsible decision-making. Influenced by participatory approaches such as Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, the process emphasized collaboration, critical reflection, and shared learning.

The effectiveness of Ssewanyana's approach lies in its ability to transform awareness from a process of information transmission into one of collective engagement. Through creative activities, participants were able to discuss sensitive issues, challenge misconceptions, and explore possible solutions within supportive environments. Art therefore functioned not only as a medium of communication but also as a catalyst for dialogue and behavioral reflection.

Another significant aspect of his work is the connection between community-based artistic practice and broader development goals. By aligning his projects with public health objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Ssewanyana demonstrates how creative practice can contribute to social development while remaining culturally relevant and locally grounded. His work therefore illustrates the potential of visual art to bridge personal experiences and public policy concerns.

Ssewanyana's participatory methodology is highly relevant to the present study. His use of workshops, collaborative art-making, and dialogue provides an important model for

investigating socially sensitive issues through creative practice. While his work focuses on HIV/AIDS awareness, the present research applies similar principles to the exploration of mental health challenges. Both approaches recognize that awareness is most effective when communities are actively involved in the process of creating, interpreting, and discussing visual narratives.

The practices of Mutebi and Ssewanyana demonstrate the importance of participation in socially engaged art. While Mutebi employs printmaking workshops to encourage civic reflection and community storytelling, Ssewanyana combines visual art, dialogue, and performance to address public health challenges. Both artists move beyond the production of artworks as objects and instead emphasize artistic processes that engage communities directly. Their work suggests that awareness is strengthened when audiences become active participants in the creation and interpretation of visual messages rather than passive observers.

4.2.6 Martin Senkubuge – Portraiture to Challenge Skin-Related Stigma



Figure 14*:* A charcoal and pencil drawing of Isaac Kyoyeta, an events manager in Kampala.
Photograph: Joshua Ssemaganda and Anthony Patience/Courtesy Martin Senkubuge

Martin Senkubuge (b.1996) is a Ugandan Artist, Researcher and Curator based in Kampala, who is known for his transformative charcoal drawings on paper inspired by the beauty of

vitiligo. Martin Senkubuge's *Part of Us* project demonstrates how portraiture can be used to challenge stigma, promote inclusion, and raise awareness about marginalized experiences. Focusing on individuals living with vitiligo, a skin condition that is often misunderstood within Ugandan society, the project uses visual representation to confront prejudice and encourage empathy.

Through a series of highly realistic charcoal and pencil portraits (see Figure 15), Senkubuge places individuals with vitiligo at the center of public attention. Rather than portraying them as subjects of pity or difference, the portraits emphasize dignity, confidence, and individuality. This approach challenges dominant stereotypes and encourages viewers to reconsider preconceived notions surrounding physical appearance and social acceptance.

A significant aspect of the project is its emphasis on visibility. Individuals living with vitiligo are often subjected to misunderstanding, exclusion, or social stigma. By presenting their stories through portraiture, Senkubuge transforms experiences that are frequently hidden or ignored into visible and valued narratives. The artworks therefore function as a platform through which marginalized voices can be recognized and understood.

Exhibitions of the *Part of Us* series generated public engagement and dialogue around issues of identity, acceptance, and representation. Audience responses indicated that the portraits encouraged reflection and empathy, while participants reported feelings of recognition and affirmation. In this way, awareness was generated not through direct advocacy messages but through the humanizing power of visual storytelling. Senkubuge's work demonstrates that visual art can challenge social stigma by making overlooked experiences visible and relatable. The project illustrates how representation itself can become a form of advocacy, encouraging audiences to move beyond assumptions and engage with the lived realities of others.

This approach is particularly relevant to the present study because mental health challenges, like many stigmatized conditions, often remain hidden from public view. Senkubuge's use of portraiture to foster empathy and social understanding provides insight into how visual art can create awareness around experiences that are frequently misunderstood or silenced. Similarly, this research uses mixed-media printmaking to bring attention to underlying causes of mental health challenges, creating opportunities for dialogue, recognition, and community understanding.

While Nabulime, Mutebi, and Ssewanyana primarily use art to facilitate dialogue and community participation, Senkubuge demonstrates the awareness-raising potential of representation itself. His work suggests that social change can begin when marginalized experiences are made visible and humanized through visual imagery. Together, these artists

reveal that awareness can be generated through multiple strategies, including participation, education, symbolism, and representation, each contributing to broader processes of social understanding and inclusion.

Art-Based Organizations and Community Engagement in Uganda

Faces Up Uganda – Youth-Led Art for Healing and Social Advocacy

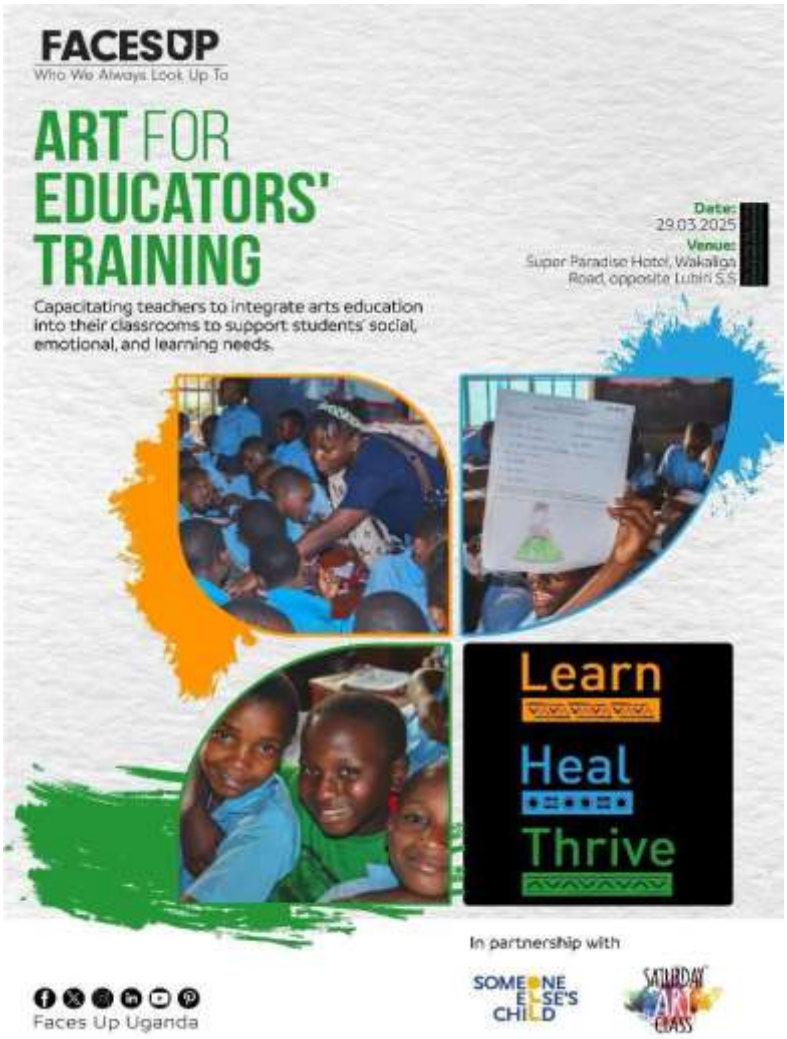


Figure 15*:* One of the online poster adverts by Faces up Uganda on a campaign ART FOR EDUCATORS TRAINING.

Faces Up Uganda demonstrates how community-based visual art can be used to promote healing, social awareness, and youth empowerment. Through mural painting, visual storytelling, arts education, and participatory workshops, the organization engages young people, refugees, educators, and community members in creative processes that encourage dialogue around social challenges and personal experiences.

A central aspect of Faces Up Uganda's work is the use of collaborative art-making to address issues such as trauma, gender equality, displacement, education, and mental health (see Figure 16). Rather than treating art solely as a finished product, the organization emphasizes the creative process as a space for reflection, expression, and community engagement. Participants are encouraged to share experiences, contribute ideas, and collectively create visual narratives that represent their realities and aspirations.

The organization's Art for Educators Training programme further demonstrates how visual art can be integrated into educational and community settings as a tool for dialogue and emotional support. By equipping teachers and community leaders with creative methods of engagement, the initiative extends the impact of art beyond exhibitions and workshops into everyday learning environments. This approach recognizes that awareness is strengthened when creative practices become part of ongoing social interaction rather than isolated events.

An important contribution of Faces Up Uganda is its integration of artistic practice with psychosocial wellbeing. Through participatory activities, young people are provided with opportunities to express emotions, process experiences, and engage in collective problem-solving. In this way, art functions not only as a medium for communication but also as a mechanism for healing, empowerment, and social connection.

The organization's work illustrates that awareness-raising is most effective when communities are actively involved in creating and interpreting visual messages. By combining advocacy, education, and emotional expression, Faces Up Uganda demonstrates how visual art can contribute to both individual wellbeing and broader social change.

The relevance of this approach to the present study is significant. Like Faces Up Uganda, this research employs participatory art processes to facilitate reflection and dialogue around socially sensitive issues. While Faces Up addresses a broad range of community concerns, the present study focuses specifically on the causes of mental health challenges. Both approaches recognize that visual art can create supportive environments where individuals are able to explore experiences, share perspectives, and contribute to collective understanding.

The work of Ssewanyana and Faces Up Uganda highlights the importance of participation and community engagement within socially oriented art practice. While Ssewanyana utilizes creative workshops to address public health challenges, Faces Up Uganda combines artistic

expression, education, and psychosocial support to engage communities in broader social issues. Both approaches demonstrate that awareness is strengthened when artistic practice creates opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and collective action. Their work reinforces the view that art is not only a means of communication but also a process through which communities can learn, heal, and transform.

Muundo Foundation – Mixed Media Art for Mental Health and Identity



Figure 16*:* A poster by Muundo foundation for an art activity during the word vitiligo awareness month.

Muundo Foundation is a youth-led arts initiative that uses participatory visual art practices to facilitate dialogue around mental health, identity, and personal development. Through workshops, exhibitions, community engagement activities, and collaborative art-making processes, the organization demonstrates how visual art can be used to address socially sensitive issues while creating opportunities for reflection and self-expression.

A key feature of Muundo Foundation's practice is the use of mixed-media approaches that combine drawing, collage, printmaking, painting, and other visual methods. These processes encourage participants to explore personal experiences, social pressures, and emotional challenges through creative expression. By translating complex feelings and lived experiences into visual forms, participants are provided with alternative ways of communicating issues that may otherwise remain difficult to discuss openly.

The foundation's workshops place particular emphasis on youth engagement and dialogue. Participants are encouraged to share experiences, interpret visual symbols, and reflect collectively on themes relating to identity, wellbeing, resilience, and social belonging. Through this process, awareness is generated not only through the production of artworks but also through the conversations and reflections that emerge during artistic engagement.

Exhibitions and public presentations organized by the foundation further extend these conversations into community spaces. By presenting artworks that explore themes of mental health and personal experience, the organization creates opportunities for audiences to engage with issues that are often stigmatized or overlooked within everyday discourse. The artworks therefore function as catalysts for dialogue, encouraging viewers to consider the social and cultural factors that influence individual wellbeing.

Another important aspect of Muundo Foundation's practice is its integration of contemporary artistic approaches with culturally relevant forms of communication. By drawing upon local experiences, shared values, and community narratives, the organization seeks to make discussions around mental health more accessible and meaningful within the Ugandan context. This culturally grounded approach strengthens audience engagement and supports broader efforts to reduce stigma surrounding mental health challenges.

Muundo Foundation demonstrates how mixed-media art can function simultaneously as a form of creative expression, community engagement, and social awareness. Its emphasis on participation, reflection, and dialogue highlights the potential of visual art to create supportive spaces where sensitive issues can be explored collectively.

The significance of this case study to the present research is particularly strong. Like Muundo Foundation, this study employs mixed-media processes and participatory engagement to explore issues related to mental health. The foundation's work provides evidence that visual art can facilitate conversations around emotional wellbeing and social pressures, supporting

the broader argument that mixed-media printmaking can be used to raise awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Uganda.

Across the selected artists and organizations, several common strategies for awareness-raising emerge. These include the use of symbolism (Nabulime), participatory printmaking (Mutebi), cultural education (Nuwagaba), material meaning and collaboration (Nakisanze), community dialogue (Ssewanyana), representation of marginalized experiences (Senkubuge), healing-centered engagement (Faces Up Uganda), and mental health advocacy through mixed-media practice (Muundo Foundation). Although these practitioners work with different media and address diverse social concerns, they collectively demonstrate that visual art is most effective as a tool for awareness when it encourages participation, reflection, dialogue, and emotional connection.

Conclusion

The analysis of selected Ugandan artists and organizations demonstrates that visual art has consistently functioned as a powerful tool for raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and encouraging social transformation. Across diverse media including sculpture, printmaking, painting, textile art, portraiture, murals, and mixed-media practice, artists have addressed issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender inequality, cultural identity, environmental sustainability, body stigma, youth empowerment, and mental health. These examples reveal that visual art extends beyond aesthetic expression and serves as a socially engaged practice capable of communicating complex issues in accessible and culturally relevant ways.

A key finding emerging from this analysis is that awareness is generated not merely through the presentation of information but through active audience engagement. The reviewed artists and organizations employ a range of strategies including symbolism, participation, storytelling, representation, collaboration, and community dialogue. Whether through Nabulime's symbolic sculptures, Mutebi's participatory printmaking, Nuwagaba's cultural documentation, Nakisanze's material symbolism, Ssewanyana's community workshops, Senkubuge's humanizing portraiture, Faces Up Uganda's healing-centered programmes, or Muundo Foundation's mental health initiatives, the effectiveness of visual art lies in its ability to connect social issues to lived experience. These approaches encourage audiences to reflect, question assumptions, share experiences, and engage in conversations that might otherwise remain difficult or inaccessible.

Another important observation is that the majority of the reviewed practitioners employ socially engaged and participatory approaches that position communities as contributors rather

than passive audiences. This suggests that awareness is most effective when individuals are involved in the creation, interpretation, and discussion of visual messages. The findings therefore reinforce the value of Arts-Based Research (ABR), which views artistic practice as a legitimate means of generating knowledge, facilitating dialogue, and producing social understanding.

While many of the reviewed artists primarily operate within specific media such as sculpture, painting, printmaking, portraiture, or textile art, the present study adopts a deliberately mixed-media approach. This decision reflects the complex and interconnected nature of mental health challenges, which are influenced by social, economic, cultural, and personal factors. The integration of multiple materials, techniques, and visual strategies provides greater flexibility for representing these layered experiences and enables the creation of artworks that engage audiences across different social and cultural contexts.

The findings from this objective provide both conceptual and methodological foundations for the next phase of the study. The reviewed artists demonstrate that visual art can effectively raise awareness when it combines symbolic communication with participation, dialogue, and cultural relevance. Building upon these insights, the subsequent objective focuses on the development of mixed-media printmaking artworks and participatory workshops designed to raise awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala. In doing so, the study extends existing traditions of socially engaged art practice into the specific context of mental health awareness and community wellbeing.

The findings from Objective Two therefore establish the conceptual, contextual, and methodological framework upon which this study is built. By demonstrating the potential of socially engaged visual art while identifying opportunities for further exploration through mixed-media printmaking, they provide a clear foundation for the next phase of the research. Objective Three focuses on the production of original mixed-media prints that visually communicate the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala, applying the insights gained from the reviewed artists and organisations to create artworks that are both culturally relevant and socially responsive.

4.3 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS FOR Objective 3: To produce mixed media prints that visually communicate the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala.

This section addresses objective three of the study guided by the research question, how can mixed media printmaking be used to communicate the mental health challenges in Kampala District. The researcher employed a practice-led approach through a series of participatory

printmaking workshops involving school children and community youth as well as personal studio time. The activities were conducted in Masanafu and Namungoona, urban suburbs of Kampala, Uganda. These locations were selected for their dense populations, varied socio-economic demographics, and accessibility to youth-centered schools and programs through Faces Up- Uganda. The institutions engaged included:

- Masanafu Secondary School
- Masanafu Progressive Secondary School
- Namungoona Progressive Secondary School
- Kigobe Primary School
- Faces Up Uganda Community Centre

For most participants, this was their first encounter with printmaking. The approach was deliberately low-tech and experimental, using found materials, textures, and everyday objects to ensure inclusivity and affordability. The workshops served both as educational sessions and as informal psychosocial spaces to explore emotional themes through visual expression. With an analysis of what other artists have used visual art and knowing of some shortcomings, I decided to use mixed media printing to enhance the communication aspect.

Translating Research Findings into Visual Concepts

The production of mixed media prints in this study was informed directly by the findings generated under Objective One, which sought to identify the major contributors to mental health challenges among young people in Kampala District. Through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, workshop observations, and field notes, five recurring themes emerged: academic pressure, economic pressure and financial instability, time pressure and age-related expectations, public opinion and social judgment, and concealed emotional struggles.

Within an Arts-Based Research (ABR) framework, these findings were not treated solely as textual or verbal data. Instead, they became creative stimuli that informed the development of visual concepts, symbols, materials, and compositions. The researcher sought to transform participant experiences into visual forms capable of communicating complex emotional and social realities through mixed media printmaking.

Workshop observations further revealed that participants often expressed difficult emotions through symbols, colors, textures, and metaphors rather than through direct verbal explanations. Drawings, discussions, and reflective exercises frequently referenced school-related stress, financial hardship, societal expectations, emotional suppression, and experiences

of judgment. These recurring concerns provided a foundation for the symbolic language used throughout the studio production process.

The translation of findings into visual concepts followed a constructivist approach, where meaning was actively constructed through artistic interpretation. Rather than illustrating participants' experiences literally, the researcher developed visual metaphors capable of representing broader social and psychological realities. In this way, the artworks functioned both as artistic responses and as visual forms of knowledge production.

The resulting prints therefore emerged from a direct relationship between research findings and artistic practice. Each artwork was developed as a visual interpretation of a specific contributor to mental health challenges identified during the field study, ensuring that the production process remained grounded in participant experiences while simultaneously extending those experiences into a public awareness context.

4.7.1 Participatory Workshops and Visual Exploration

Participatory printmaking workshops were conducted at Faces up Uganda Community Centre, Masanafu Secondary School, Masanafu Progressive Secondary School, Namungoona Progressive Secondary School, and Kigobe Primary School. These workshops introduced participants to basic printmaking techniques and provided opportunities for visual exploration around themes relating to mental health and everyday life experiences.



Figure 17: Researcher in a one-on-one sketching with a participant.

The workshops served two purposes within the study. First, they familiarized participants with printmaking processes and materials. Second, they generated observations, discussions, sketches, and symbolic references that informed the researcher's understanding of how young people visually represented experiences associated with mental health challenges.



Figure 18*:* Students sharing color pallets and water at a station table at a print making workshop at faces up

4.7.3 Printmaking as a Catalyst for Participation and Emotional Expression

Initial engagement revealed hesitancy among some students, particularly those who identified as shy or inexperienced in art. However, as sessions progressed, students became increasingly immersed in the process. Printmaking's tactile, exploratory nature seemed to bypass the fear of failure. The simplicity of the materials leaves, bottle caps, textured fabrics invited curiosity and experimentation.



Figure 19*:* During a wood block workshop at faces up

"I thought art was for special people. But this is something I can do. And it's actually fun,"

Participant, Faces Up Uganda (2024)



Figure 20*:* The researcher in one of the print making workshops at Faces Up Uganda center in Masanafu.

Many participants expressed joy and surprise at how easy and satisfying it was to make prints. Even children who initially described themselves as introverts became visibly more expressive. They began sharing tools, discussing their results, and inviting the facilitator to "come and see what I made."

These shifts in group dynamics highlight printmaking's capacity to lower psychological defenses, making space for self-expression in environments where verbal disclosure through narration may be intimidating or taboo.

4.7.4 Semi-structured interviews: Mental Health Narratives through Art

Rather than initiating direct interviews on mental health which often risked triggering defensiveness or fear, the workshops employed symbolic tasks that allowed emotional themes to emerge organically. In one session, students were asked to print a "face" using only two colors: red and black on a white background, relying solely on shapes to depict how they felt that day.

One child created a red face with jagged, exposed teeth and later explained:

"That's how my father looked last night when he came home drunk."

Another student printed a serene, smiling shape and simply said*, "I feel okay today."*

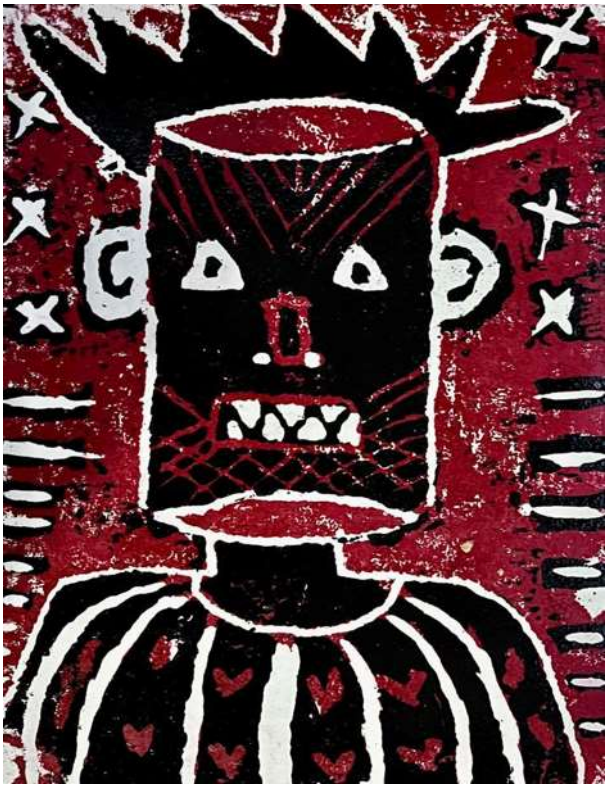


Figure 21*:* One of the artworks by one of the workshop participants.

These visual articulations reflected varied psychological states of fear, contentment, tension without requiring clinical language. The use of non-verbal symbols enabled participants to explore their inner landscapes without shame or censorship.
This aligns with Malchiodi (2003), who argues that visual art can offer pathways into emotional processing, especially for individuals who are not ready or equipped to verbalize their experiences and, in some way, offering healing.

4.7.5 Healing Through Process: Repetition, Texture, and Control

Healing is rarely a linear process. It often requires revisiting experiences, making adjustments, and gradually rebuilding a sense of safety and control. Printmaking, by its very nature, embodies this process through layers, pressure, trial-and-error, and repeated impressions. These formal qualities mirror emotional healing, where thoughts and feelings are often cyclical, textured, and unresolved before they begin to settle. Rather than striving for perfection, participants engaged in a process of experimentation, reflection, and gradual refinement.

Many participants wanted to redo a print, adjust the pressure, or remix colours. These seemingly simple actions became opportunities to exercise choice, regain control, and revise their work without fear of failure. Each new impression represented not only a technical adjustment but also a moment of reflection, encouraging participants to embrace mistakes as part of learning rather than as permanent setbacks. In this way, the printmaking process itself became therapeutic, demonstrating that healing, like printmaking, is built through repeated attempts, patience, and transformation.

For children exposed to trauma or unpredictability, as many disclosed during informal conversations and reflective activities, the structured yet flexible nature of printmaking provided a safe framework for exploration without negative consequences. The predictable sequence of inking, pressing, lifting, and revealing an image created a sense of order that contrasted with the uncertainty many experienced in their daily lives. At the same time, the unexpected variations in each print encouraged curiosity and resilience, showing that imperfect outcomes could still produce meaningful and beautiful results.

One facilitator note reads:

> *"A boy who had been quiet for the whole first session ended up doing six prints in a row, mixing red and black in new ways, each more confident than the last. He kept saying 'again… again.'"*

Such moments illustrate the healing potential of repetitive creative processes. The rhythm of printing, the tactile engagement with materials, and the opportunity to make repeated decisions fostered self-regulation, concentration, and emotional resilience. Through repetition, participants gradually developed confidence and a renewed sense of agency. In this context, healing emerged not only from the images that were produced but also from the process of making itself, where each impression offered another opportunity to reflect, adapt, and move forward.

4.7.6 Building Social Connection and Collaborative Healing

As sessions evolved, printmaking became a social tool. Students began working in pairs, exchanging materials, discussing techniques, and collaboratively assembling compositions. This cooperative energy stood in stark contrast to the early-session isolation and performance anxiety many displayed.



Figure 22*:* Students showing off their group works created from the print making workshop at faces up

In some sessions, the group co-created large collage prints from individual elements, a process that encouraged belonging, teamwork, and shared meaning-making. Participants also began interpreting each other's prints, building empathy and awareness.

Teachers later reported noticeable behavioral shifts, particularly among students who were known to be withdrawn or disruptive. The workshops, though not designed as clinical interventions, inadvertently created an alternative support system grounded in art practice. The engagement of art presented opportunities for reflection.

Reflections and Implications

The field findings suggest that mixed media printmaking functions as both a therapeutic process and a diagnostic mirror. It facilitates:

- Access to emotion through non-verbal means.
- Safe experimentation and play, which can counter rigid perfectionism.
- Collaboration and communication among peers
- Externalization of trauma in symbolic and manageable forms
- Reduced stigma, by creating spaces where emotion is normalized and shared

Given the context of Uganda where mental health services remain underfunded and stigmatized, printmaking offers a low-cost, culturally adaptable, and inclusive form of psychosocial support.

STUDIO PRACTICE AND ARTISTIC PRODUCTION

Mixed Media Printmaking as Visual Communication of the contributors to the Mental Health challenges.



Figure 23: Printmaking tools for wood block printing.

This section explores the researcher's studio-based response to the mental health themes uncovered in the field. Working from the five interrelated categories of distress academic pressure, time pressure, economic stress, public judgment, and concealed struggles the researcher developed a body of original mixed media prints. These artworks aimed not only to

give form to invisible experiences, but also to function as conversation pieces and awareness tools within a Ugandan context.

The process involved a cycle of ideation, sketching, peer critique, approval, material selection, and iterative printmaking.



Figure 24:Visual board of mental health references about Uganda from the work.

The studio practice was deeply informed by lived experience, narrative inquiry, and the poetic interpretations of contributors such as Heights the Preacher.



Figure 25*:* Sketches of mental health related contributors Work.

Artistic Process: From Concept to Execution

Each print began with sketches, developed from thematic reflections and symbolic storytelling. Once finalized and reviewed for conceptual strength, the researcher selected color palettes based on the emotional weight of each theme. The color choices were intentionally grounded in psychological associations and cultural symbolism.

Reduction printing was used as the primary technique, producing both monochrome color editions and black-and-white base prints. The artist created seven editions per print, each carrying subtle variations in ink application and material layering to emphasize different dimensions of the theme. Elements of collage and fabric integration were included to increase texture, metaphor, and tactility.



Figure 26*:* The off cuts of the wood block from the work.

The process of carving became meditative for the researcher. Unlike many other activities where attention span is fleeting, printmaking sustained prolonged concentration and emotional focus.



Figure 27*:* The wood blocks used for reduction printing by the researcher.

> *"Carving keeps me grounded. I can work from morning to evening without checking my phone. That doesn't happen anywhere else in my life."*
> *Researcher's reflective journal (2024)*

This personal insight underscores printmaking's therapeutic potential not only for public engagement, but also for the artist's own mental well-being.

Reduction Prints and Material Experimentation

All prints were produced as reduction prints, where the same block is carved further with each new layer of color, making each edition unique and non-replicable after a point. This technique mirrored the irreversibility of emotional damage once something is carved away, it cannot return.

Several editions were enhanced using denim scraps, censored tape, or torn paper, transforming the prints into mixed media reliefs. Others integrated carvings from earlier stages preserving pieces that were "left behind" in the reduction process. These discarded carvings became artworks in themselves, symbolizing fragments of memory or internal self often overlooked.

Creative Collaboration and Poetic Interpretation

As part of the studio exploration and wider goal of using mixed media printmaking to communicate mental health and well-being, the researcher collaborated with fellow Ugandan creatives. This phase of the work extended beyond visual practice to include interdisciplinary dialogue, specifically through poetry. Among the most impactful responses were two poems by Heights the Preacher, a contemporary Ugandan poet who's writing vividly captures the emotional, economic, and psychological complexities that mirror many of the research themes. These poems do not just illustrate mental distress, they embody it, using rhythm, metaphor, and language rooted in everyday Ugandan life. To maintain their emotional weight and literary integrity, both poems are presented in full before analysis.

Poem 1

Untitled by Heights the Preacher

I need, that
money, that
Doesn't need me.
Give me that
change, But
it is not free.
I shout in
silence, When
My closed eyes see.
All of this
violence, for a fee.

Poem 2

Uncle Bill — by Heights the Preacher

I met uncle Bill.,
Along the streets.
I forced a smile that hardly showed my teeth.
Uncle Bill met me right at my house
and left me dreaming of how to heal.
He stroke a deal., to make a kill

Said I could sue side A or side B.
No court., no appeal.
He made some believe that escaping him
was by a rope on the tree up the hill.
With each breath I take., I feel,
uncle bill suffocates his way to me.
I need a way., to burn it away from me.
May take the credit for his missing.
Earn it in a way that makes me forget his mission.
He keeps showing up and down.
Exactly how he's turning my life now.
If you can't escape the Bill,
How do I kill how it makes me feel?

Interpretation and Symbolism

These poems operate as creative data artistic expressions that not only reflect the emotional landscape of Ugandans grappling with mental distress, but also enrich the visual themes of this study. They echo the findings discussed in earlier sections, particularly those concerning economic stress, hidden emotional pain, and the absence of mental health literacy.

Untitled: Poem 1

This piece captures the relentless pressure of financial instability and the psychological cost of survival. The lines:

"I shout in silence, When / My closed eyes see."

Represent suppressed trauma, a kind of internal scream that goes unnoticed. It resonates with the print on economic pressure, where the head is depicted as an ATM with low balance, endlessly swiped by invisible hands.

Uncle Bill:

This poem uses "Uncle Bill" as a personification of emotional trauma, depression, or perhaps systemic poverty. He is a haunting figure familiar, inescapable, and manipulative. The reference to "a rope on the tree up the hill" is a chilling nod to suicide, while the line "No court., no appeal" emphasizes the hopelessness of struggling alone.

This directly connects to your print Concealed Struggles, in which a man is hit by a wrecking ball yet shows no emotion. Just as the poem's speaker cannot express pain except through metaphor, the visual figure remains censored, stoic, and silent despite internal chaos.

Print Descriptions and Symbolic Intent

Academic Pressure

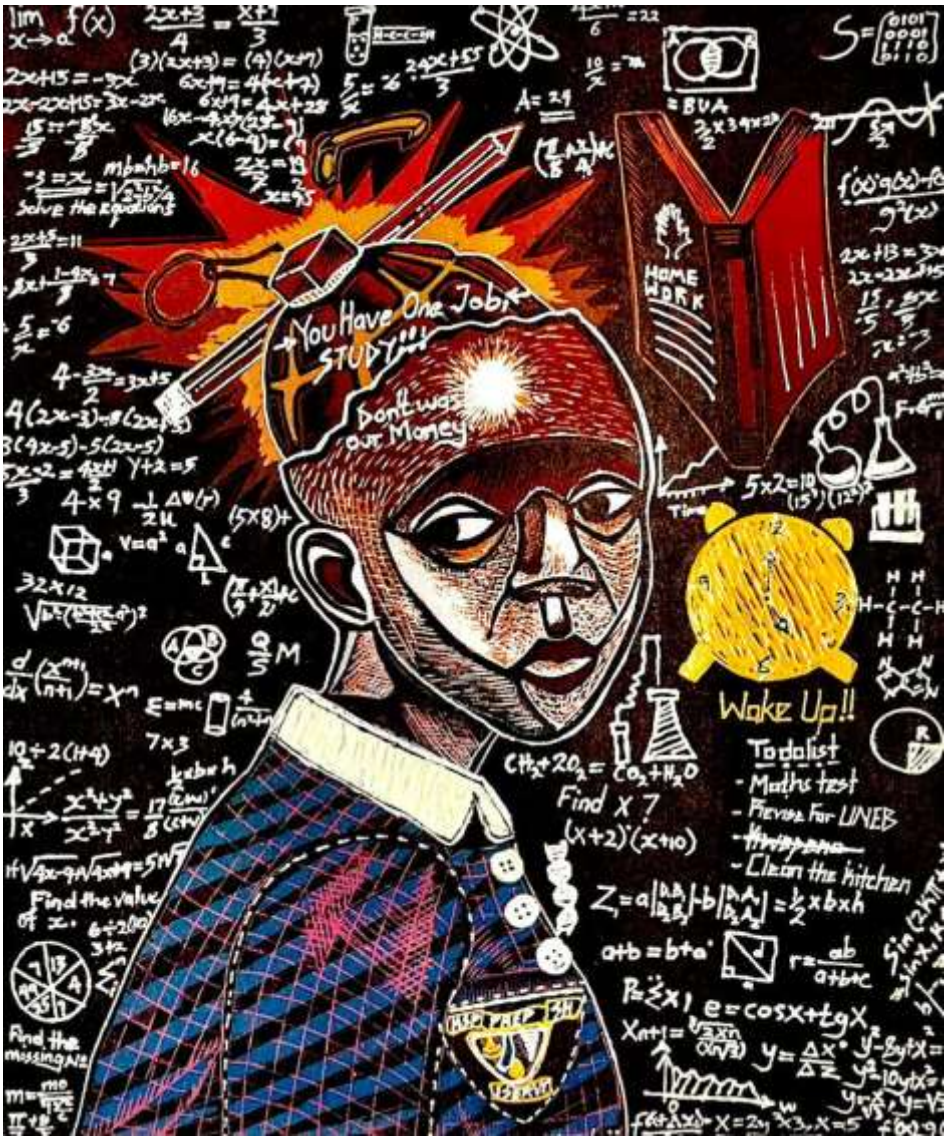


Figure 28*:* Academic Pressure, mixed media reduction print on paper and fabric, 32*48 cm, photograph by Researcher.

The artwork Academic Pressure was developed from findings under Objective One, where participants consistently identified academic demands as a major contributor to mental health challenges among young people in Kampala District. Questionnaire responses, interviews, and

workshop discussions revealed concerns related to examinations, competition, parental expectations, school fees, and the pressure to achieve academic success.

The mind-mapping process identified several recurring symbols associated with academic stress, including schoolbooks, examination papers, classroom formulas, alarm clocks, and parental instructions. These symbols were refined through sketch development and later incorporated into the final composition as visual metaphors representing the educational pressures experienced by many learners.

At the center of the composition is a schoolchild whose facial expression suggests exhaustion, anxiety, and emotional strain. Surrounding the figure are mathematical equations, scientific formulas, and instructional texts that create a crowded visual environment. The accumulation of these elements was intended to communicate the overwhelming volume of expectations placed upon students. The inscription, “You have one job: STUDY!! Don’t waste our money,” reflects statements frequently associated with parental and societal expectations regarding academic performance.

Mixed media elements were incorporated to strengthen the communicative capacity of the artwork. Layered textures and printed surfaces create a sense of visual congestion, reflecting the accumulation of academic responsibilities. The use of bold carved text and overlapping imagery emphasizes the constant presence of educational demands within the student's daily life. Additional symbols such as an alarm clock and laboratory equipment represent deadlines, examinations, and institutional expectations.

The choice of red and yellow hues was intended to reinforce feelings of urgency, pressure, and heightened emotional intensity. These colours complement the visual narrative by emphasizing the stressful conditions associated with academic achievement and performance.

The artwork communicates how educational aspirations, while often viewed positively, may also contribute to anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress when accompanied by excessive expectations. By translating participant experiences into symbolic visual language, the print demonstrates how mixed media printmaking can be used to communicate the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District.

Concealed Struggles

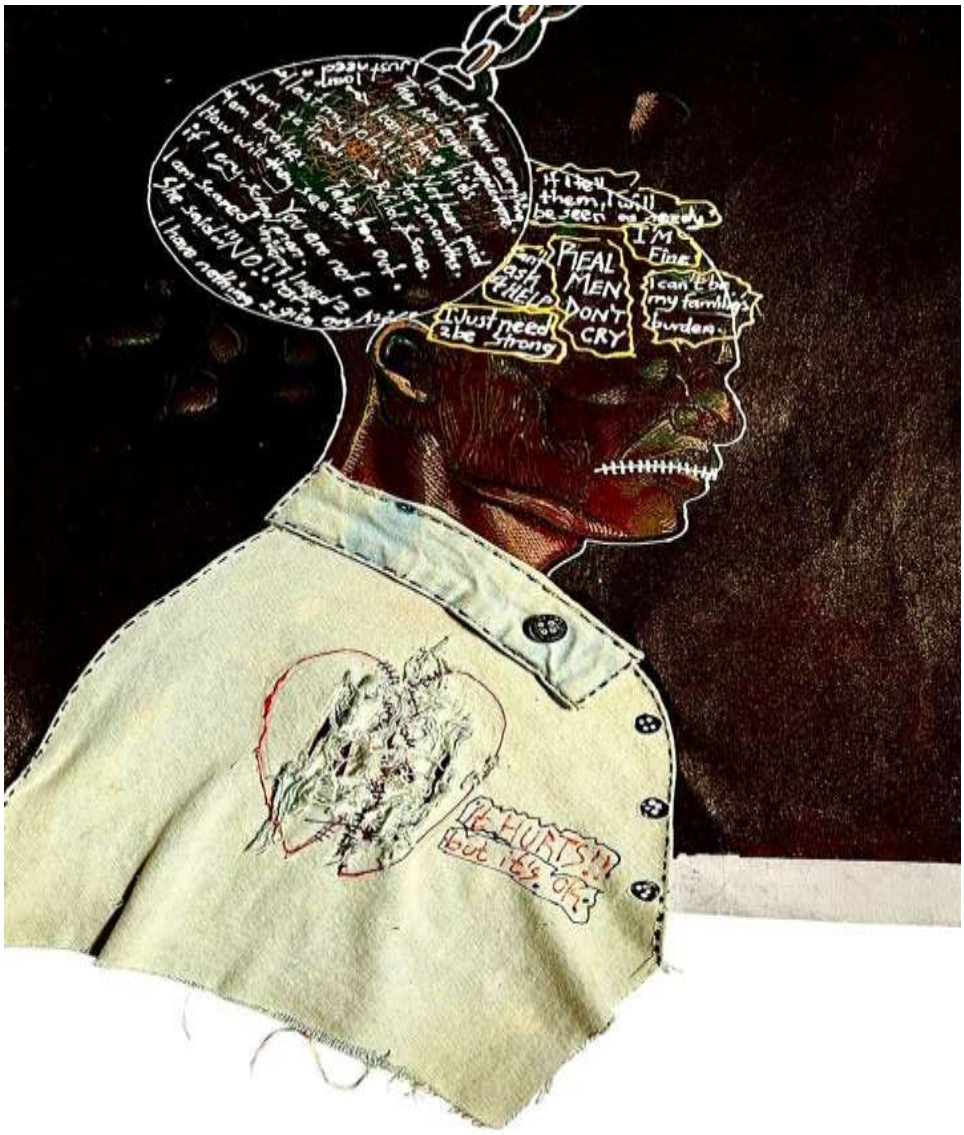


Figure 29*:* Concealed Struggles, mixed media reduction print on paper and fabric, 32*48cm, photograph by Researcher.

The artwork Concealed Struggles was developed from findings under Objective One, where participants revealed experiences of emotional suppression, stigma, fear of judgment, and difficulties discussing personal mental health challenges. Interviews and workshop discussions indicated that many individuals, particularly men, felt compelled to conceal emotional distress due to cultural expectations that associate vulnerability with weakness.

During the mind-mapping and symbol development process, several recurring ideas emerged, including silence, emotional burden, loneliness, self-doubt, and social expectations

surrounding masculinity. These findings informed the development of visual symbols such as the stitched mouth, the wrecking ball, textual inscriptions, and the damaged heart, all of which were incorporated into the final composition to communicate concealed emotional suffering.

The composition presents a young man in profile with his lips stitched shut, symbolizing the inability or unwillingness to openly discuss emotional difficulties. Attached to his head is a large wrecking ball carrying phrases such as “You are not enough,” “Don’t show weakness,” and “No one would understand.” These inscriptions represent the negative thoughts, social pressures, and internalized beliefs that often accompany mental distress. Additional textual elements referencing expectations of masculinity further emphasize the pressure to remain emotionally silent despite personal struggles.

Mixed media materials were incorporated to strengthen the communicative impact of the artwork. Fabric was applied to the figure to symbolize the human body, personal identity, and lived experience. Embroidered stitching was used to create the image of a damaged heart bearing the words “I’m hurting but it’s okay,” representing both emotional injury and attempts to conceal suffering. The stitched elements introduce a tactile dimension that reinforces themes of vulnerability, repair, and resilience. By combining printmaking with textile interventions, the work communicates emotional experiences that may be difficult to express through words alone.

The use of red and yellow hues was intended to reinforce feelings of emotional intensity, psychological strain, and internal conflict. These colours contribute to the visual tension within the composition and draw attention to the emotional weight carried by the figure.

The artwork communicates how stigma, gender expectations, and fear of judgment can contribute to hidden mental health challenges. By translating participant experiences into symbolic imagery and mixed media forms, the print demonstrates how visual art can raise awareness of emotional struggles that often remain unseen within society. The artwork therefore illustrates the potential of mixed media printmaking to communicate the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District. The theme of concealed struggles was previously identified under Objective One, where participants described difficulties discussing emotional challenges due to stigma, fear of judgment, and expectations surrounding strength and self-reliance.

Time Pressure and Age-Related Expectations

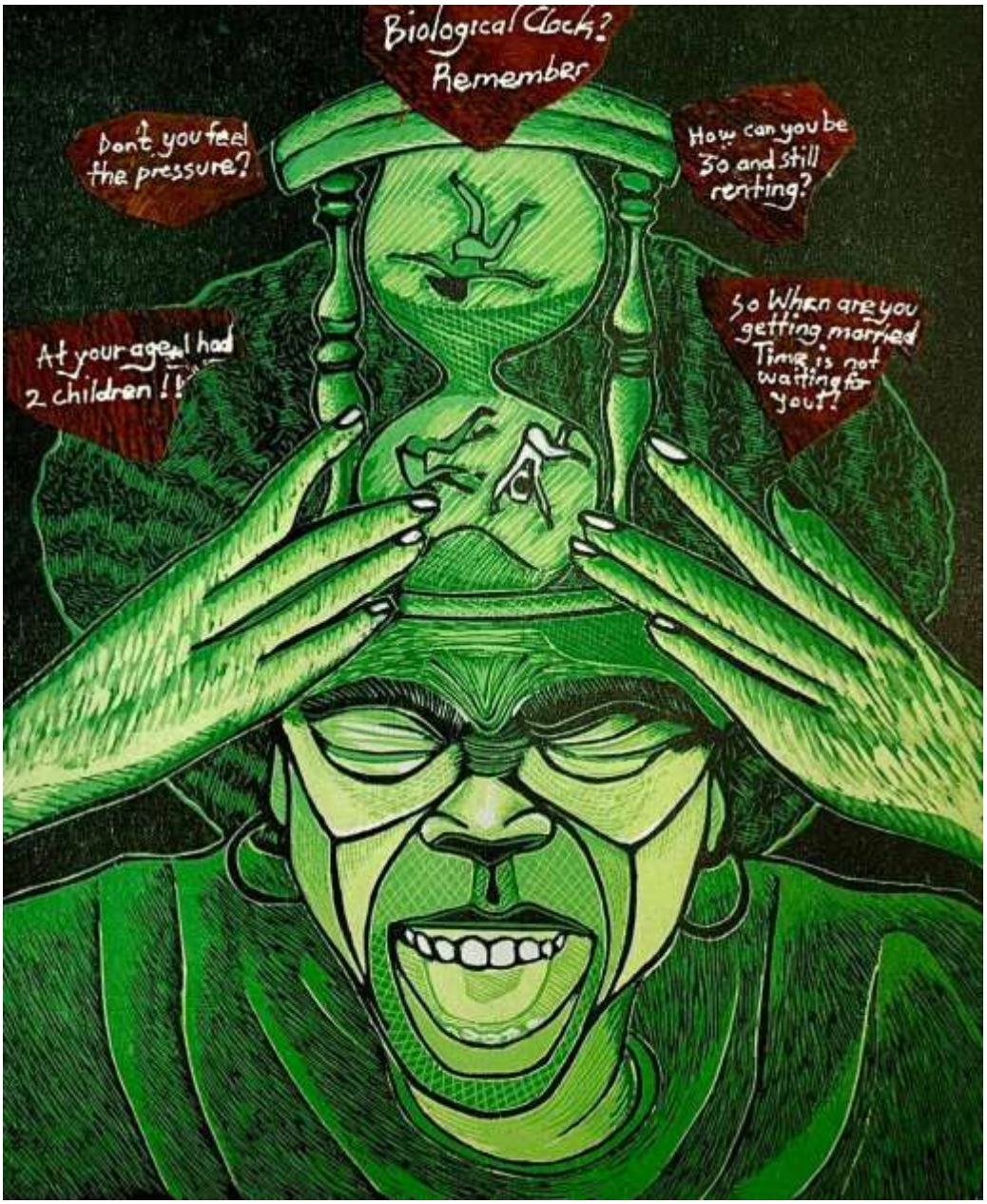


Figure 30: Time Pressure and Age-Related Expectations, mixed media reduction print on paper, 32 × 48 cm, photograph by Researcher.

The artwork Time Pressure and Age-Related Expectations was developed from findings under Objective One, where participants frequently described experiencing anxiety arising from societal expectations tied to age, achievement, marriage, parenthood, and financial independence. Interviews and questionnaires revealed that many participants felt pressured to achieve certain milestones within socially prescribed timelines, leading to feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and self-doubt when those expectations were not met.

During the mind-mapping and symbol development process, recurring ideas included deadlines, aging, comparison with peers, family expectations, marriage, parenthood, and financial success. These findings informed the development of key visual symbols, particularly the hourglass, which became the central metaphor within the composition. Additional textual elements were incorporated to represent the voices of family members, peers, and society that contribute to time-related pressure.

At the centre of the composition, a figure is shown screaming while holding an oversized hourglass. The hourglass functions both as a symbol of passing time and as a representation of societal expectations. The distressed expression of the figure communicates emotional strain, while the fragmented forms contained within the hourglass suggest a deteriorating sense of self caused by constant comparison and social judgment. The visual relationship between the figure and the hourglass emphasizes the feeling of being trapped by expectations associated with age and achievement.

Surrounding the figure are inscriptions such as “At your age, I had two children,” “So, when are you getting married?” and “How can you be 30 and still renting?” These statements were informed by recurring sentiments expressed by participants and represent common forms of social pressure encountered within everyday life. The placement of these phrases around the figure creates a sense of visual and psychological confinement, reinforcing the overwhelming nature of these expectations.

The monochromatic green colour scheme was selected to create visual unity while emphasizing emotional tension and uncertainty. The repetitive carved textures within the print mimic the continuous passage of time, reinforcing the central concept of life being measured through deadlines, milestones, and social comparisons.

Through the use of symbolic imagery, text, and printmaking techniques, the artwork communicates how age-related expectations and societal timelines can contribute to mental health challenges. The work highlights the psychological burden created when personal worth becomes linked to externally imposed measures of success. By translating participant experiences into visual form, the artwork demonstrates how mixed media printmaking can be used to communicate the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District.

Economic Pressure

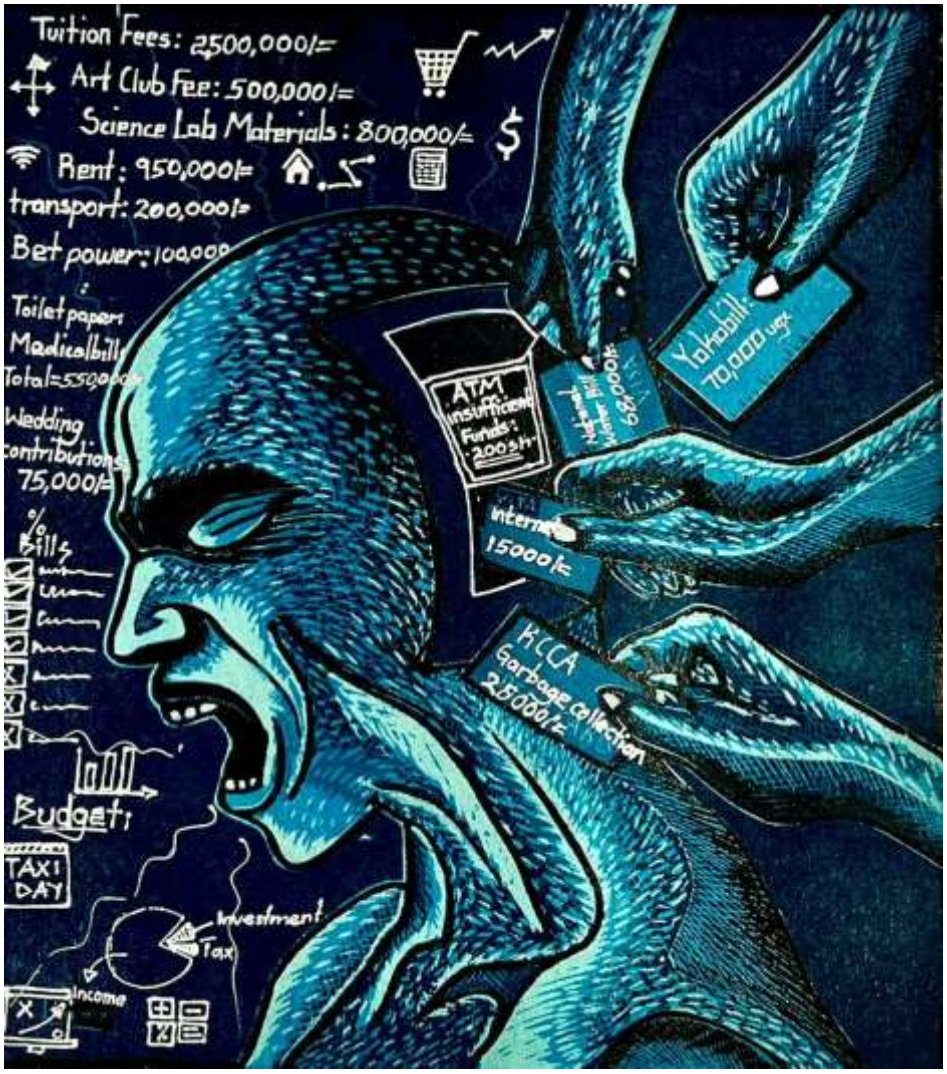


Figure 31*:* Shows the mixed media print developed on the theme of Economic Pressure, photo by Researcher.

The artwork Economic Pressure was developed from findings under Objective One, where economic hardship emerged as one of the major contributors to mental health challenges among participants in Kampala District. Questionnaire responses, interviews, field observations, and workshop discussions revealed recurring concerns related to unemployment, low income, school fees, rent, medical expenses, and the pressure to provide for dependents. Participants frequently described feelings of anxiety, frustration, helplessness, and emotional exhaustion resulting from persistent financial demands.

To translate these findings into visual form, the researcher developed a symbolic composition centered on a human head transformed into an Automated Teller Machine (ATM). The ATM symbol was selected because it represents the constant expectation that individuals should continuously provide financial resources regardless of their own emotional or economic

condition. The phrase "Insufficient Balance" appears on the ATM screen and functions both as a financial statement and a metaphor for emotional depletion.

Several hands swiping bank cards around the figure represent the multiple responsibilities identified during data collection, including rent, school fees, healthcare costs, food, and family obligations. These repeated gestures symbolize the continuous extraction of financial resources and emotional energy. The open mouth and distressed facial expression communicate the psychological burden associated with economic insecurity.

The choice of a monochromatic blue colour scheme was intended to reinforce feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and emotional strain. Reduction printmaking was selected because the gradual removal of material from the block mirrored the gradual depletion of financial resources reported by participants. With each stage of carving, sections of the original block were permanently removed, symbolically reflecting how prolonged economic pressure can erode an individual's sense of security and wellbeing.

Mixed media elements were incorporated to strengthen the communicative capacity of the artwork. Layered textures and printed surfaces create a sense of accumulation and pressure, reflecting the multiple financial responsibilities described by participants. The combination of printmaking and mixed media therefore enabled the researcher to move beyond literal representation and communicate both the visible and invisible dimensions of economic stress. This artwork demonstrates how mixed media printmaking can be used to communicate one of the major causes of mental health challenges identified in this study. By transforming participant experiences into visual symbols, the work raises awareness of the relationship between economic hardship and psychological wellbeing within the Kampala context.

Public Opinion and Social Judgment



Figure 32*:* Public Opinion and Social Judgment (2024), Mixed Media Reduction Print, 32 × 48 cm. Photograph by Researcher.

The artwork Public Opinion and Social Judgment was developed from findings under Objective One, where participants identified social criticism, public expectations, negative comments, and fear of judgment as significant contributors to mental health challenges. Data collected through questionnaires, interviews, workshop discussions, and field observations revealed that many participants experienced emotional distress arising from societal expectations regarding appearance, career choices, relationships, lifestyle decisions, and personal success. Participants frequently described feeling pressured to conform to social norms and reported anxiety resulting from constant evaluation by family members, peers, community members, and online audiences.

During the mind-mapping and symbol development process, recurring themes of criticism, comparison, social pressure, and public scrutiny emerged from the data. These findings informed the selection of visual symbols including megaphones, social media icons, textual statements, and an overwhelmed central figure. These symbols were chosen because they communicate the experience of being surrounded by multiple external voices that influence personal identity and self-worth.

The composition depicts a central figure clutching their head while expressing visible distress. This gesture symbolizes the psychological impact of constant judgment and criticism. Surrounding the figure are megaphones, social media symbols, and textual phrases such as “Art is not a career,” “Find a real job,” and other statements commonly encountered in everyday social interactions. These textual elements represent the voices of society and the expectations imposed upon individuals. Rather than functioning as decorative elements, the words become visual representations of social pressure and emotional burden.

Reduction printmaking was employed to create layered visual relationships between the figure and the surrounding symbols. Through the gradual removal of material from the printing block, multiple stages of the image were developed, allowing different symbolic elements to interact within the composition. The dense arrangement of carved marks, text, and imagery creates a sense of visual congestion that reflects the overwhelming nature of constant public scrutiny.

Mixed media elements were incorporated to strengthen the communicative potential of the artwork. Additional printed layers and surface textures were used to suggest the accumulation of opinions and judgments over time. The integration of social media imagery was particularly important in acknowledging the growing influence of digital platforms on mental wellbeing. These symbols extend the discussion beyond traditional community interactions and highlight how judgment increasingly occurs in both physical and virtual spaces.

The use of a light purple-blue monochromatic colour scheme was intended to create a sense of emotional unease while maintaining visual unity throughout the composition. The colour treatment supports the overall mood of psychological tension and social pressure without distracting from the symbolic content of the work.

The artwork communicates how public opinion and social judgment can contribute to anxiety, self-doubt, and emotional distress. By translating participant experiences into visual symbols and mixed media forms, the print demonstrates how art can be used to raise awareness of the

social pressures that affect mental wellbeing. The artwork therefore contributes to the study's objective of using mixed media printmaking to communicate the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS OF OBJECTIVE 4:

To evaluate the effectiveness of mixed media printmaking as a communication tool for mental health challenges

4.0 Introduction

This section presents an analysis of audience responses to mixed-media prints developed as part of this research on the effectiveness of mixed media printmaking in raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges among Ugandan communities. Using thematic analysis, the study explored the effectiveness of these artworks as tools for communicating complex and often stigmatized mental health issues.

4.1 Online Exhibition

An online exhibition was conducted in which participants were invited to view a selection of mixed-media printmaking artworks and respond to a structured set of guiding questions.

To systematically examine and make sense of the rich qualitative data collected through this process, thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed as the principal analytic framework. This method allowed for the rigorous identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns of meaning within the participant feedback. The analytic process proceeded through six systematic phases. First, the researcher engaged in repeated, careful reading of all responses to become thoroughly familiar with the breadth and depth of the data.

Second, initial codes were generated by identifying and labeling meaningful units of data relevant to the research aims. The coding framework drew both from the study's objectives and inductive insights emerging directly from the participants' words. Codes captured demographic information (such as age, gender, occupation, and education level) as well as key aspects of participants' engagement with the artworks. For instance, codes addressed whether the artwork had an emotional impact (Art Emo), whether participants related it to their own experiences (Art Pers), and how the visual style influenced their perception (Art Vis). Interpretative responses were coded to distinguish between hopeful or positive readings (Int Pos) and those emphasizing struggle or distress (Int Strug). Additional codes captured how clearly the message and mental health themes were understood (Msg Und, Msg Unc, MH Clear, MH Unclr, MH Mixed), and where confusion arose, whether due to the artwork's content (Conf Content) or layout (Conf Layout). Suggestions for improvement were also coded, including calls for clearer

messaging (Sug Clarity) or more explanatory context (Sug_Info), alongside other general comments and feedback (Cmnt Gen).

Third, the researcher carefully decided which parts of the data to code in depth, prioritizing content that revealed how viewers emotionally connected with the work, how they interpreted its messages, what barriers hindered their understanding, and what practical ideas they proposed for enhancing impact.

Fourth, related codes were collated and organized into preliminary broader categories. Through this process, recurring patterns of meaning were grouped to form five major thematic areas that best captured the participants' collective perspectives. The thematic areas include: 1) Emotional Engagement, 2) Interpretation and Understanding, 3) Barriers to Understanding, 4) Suggestions for Improvement, and 5) General Feedback. The themes were rigorously reviewed, refined, and revised through an iterative process of cross-checking with the original responses to ensure that each theme accurately reflected the underlying data and that overlaps or inconsistencies were resolved. Below is the explanation of each of the theme highlighting not only how audiences receive and respond to mixed-media printmaking addressing mental health and well-being, but also the expression of insights for artists and researchers working to expand the communicative and therapeutic potential of visual art in Ugandan communities.

4.1.0 Responses from online exhibition

4.1.1 Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement which refers to the degree to which participants feel emotionally connected to their learning experiences, influencing their motivation and commitment to the activity process. Emerged as a dominant theme underscoring the power of the artworks to elicit empathy, recognition, and affective responses from viewers. Many participants expressed that the artworks successfully captured the lived realities of mental strain, prompting a visceral emotional connection. For example, a 27-year-old communication officer reflected that the prints illustrated "the pressure students go through to meet needs," adding that "the face and colors depict it," highlighting how visual elements effectively communicated complex emotional states. This comment suggests that the artworks transcended mere representation to evoke genuine feeling, an essential component in mental health advocacy.

Similarly, a 45-year-old visual artist elaborated on the emotional depth of the pieces by observing that "the first artwork shows the weary face having a lot of worries thinking of so

many things to accomplish in a given time." He further noted that "the busy background also speaks a lot of what someone has to go through to be able to achieve intended tasks ahead in a specified time frame." This participant's reflection illuminates how compositional choices such as facial expressions and environmental detail combined to convey the overwhelming pressure and emotional toll experienced by individuals. Another participant, a 29-year-old visual artist, poignantly stated, "A lot goes on in our heads but it should not consume us," underscoring the internal struggle many faces and the importance of finding ways to contain or manage mental distress. He concluded emphatically, "We are all victims," implying a collective human vulnerability to mental health challenges.

These responses collectively demonstrate that the artworks succeeded in fostering emotional resonance and creating a shared space where viewers could see their struggles reflected and acknowledged. Such emotional engagement is crucial in mental health communication as it encourages empathy, reduces stigma, and validates personal experiences, all of which can promote dialogue and healing.

4.1.2 Interpretation and Understanding

The second major theme pertains to the interpretation and understanding of the artworks' messages, revealing a generally positive reception alongside nuanced observations about clarity and depth. Many participants demonstrated clear comprehension of the mental health themes, appreciating how the artworks illuminated the pressures and complexities of everyday life that contribute to mental strain. One participant with a master's degree described how "the pieces touch on mental health issues and convey the pressures people face," affirming that the artworks communicated relevant societal concerns.

A female businesswoman articulated her interpretation by emphasizing the link between economic hardship and mental health: "The artworks are reflecting the different causes of mental health and how it can badly damage one's health through stress, depression among others." This insight highlights the participant's recognition of socio-economic stressors as significant contributors to mental well-being, thereby confirming the artworks' success in contextualizing mental health within lived realities. Such understanding reflects the artworks' ability to prompt reflection on complex social determinants of mental health.

However, the data also suggest opportunities for enhancing interpretive engagement. One insightful critique focused on the titles of the artworks. A participant advised that "the titles of

an artwork give us access to them, maybe try titles that are less literal and direct but still convey what you want people to find in the piece."

This participant proposed re-naming a piece called "Academic Pressure" to "Ticking Timebomb," noting that the latter is "a bit more layered and nuanced than 'Academic Pressure'" and invites viewers "to dig to find what the work is about and not be told in such a direct way." This recommendation illustrates the potential for titles to act as interpretive gateways that stimulate curiosity and deeper cognitive engagement, rather than merely summarizing content.

This theme underscores that while the artworks were largely understood, encouraging multiple levels of interpretation through symbolic and layered meaning could enrich audience interaction and avoid overly didactic messaging. Inviting viewers to co-construct meaning promotes active engagement and fosters personal relevance.

4.1.3 Barriers to Understanding

Although the artworks were generally effective in conveying mental health themes, participants identified several barriers that limited full comprehension and emotional impact. A recurrent critique concerned the excessive use of textual information within the artworks. The 45-year-old visual artist critiqued "especially the excessive use of text in the artworks," suggesting that this detracted from the emotional and visual power. He proposed that "we could also use textures, patterns, color and maybe lines to convey the theme better." This feedback highlights how reliance on textual elements may interrupt the viewer's immersive experience and reduce the artworks' ability to communicate through purely visual and symbolic means.

Another participant, a diploma-holder visual artist, emphasized a preference for more imaginative or symbolic representation: "Sorry to say but as an artist I feel like these should come off in an imaginary way not in an illustration way." This suggests that overly literal or illustrative depictions may constrain viewer interpretation and reduce the emotional nuance that abstraction or metaphor can evoke. Participants also mentioned confusion arising from the artworks' layout and the meaning of certain symbols, indicating that clarity of presentation is essential to facilitate audience comprehension.

These barriers reflect the delicate balance required in art-based communication: while clarity is important to ensure message reception, overly explicit or text-heavy presentation risks limiting emotional engagement and interpretive openness. Such findings recommend a careful reconsideration of how visual and textual elements are integrated to optimize communication.

4.1.4 Suggestions for Improvement

The audience's thoughtful critiques were accompanied by constructive suggestions aimed at enhancing the communicative and emotional effectiveness of the artworks. Many advocated for reducing textual elements and instead utilizing richer visual textures, patterns, and color schemes to evoke mood and meaning more powerfully. The recommendation to incorporate "textures, patterns, color" and to use "lines" more intentionally suggests a desire for multisensory engagement that transcends straightforward representation.

Furthermore, some participants encouraged the development of complementary media to expand the reach and impact of mental health messaging. For instance, a communication officer recommended using "animations and short films and public debates," highlighting the value of multi-modal approaches that engage diverse audiences and stimulate dynamic conversations. This points to the importance of positioning mixed-media printmaking within broader awareness campaigns rather than as standalone interventions.

Suggestions around titling the artworks more creatively to invite interpretive exploration reinforce the idea that mental health communication benefits from subtlety and nuance. For example, renaming "Academic Pressure" as "Ticking Timebomb" was seen as a way to provide "a little nudge from the title" and allow viewers to form personal connections. Such approaches encourage viewers to engage critically with the artworks, fostering reflection rather than passive reception. Collectively, these suggestions emphasize that artistic and communicative strategies need to be audience-informed and flexible, balancing accessibility with depth, literalness with metaphor, and visual with verbal cues.

4.1.5 General Feedback on the artworks from the online exhibition.

The general feedback collected from participants reflected overall appreciation and endorsement of the mixed-media printmaking approach as an effective tool for mental health awareness. A 20-year-old businesswoman highlighted the artworks' capacity to illuminate real-life stressors, noting that "it really shows how someone has so much to spend more than what they earn and it easily causes stress." She went on to reflect on art's broader therapeutic potential: "Art brings out someone's feels and… provides a creative outlet of expressing emotions, feelings, unforgettable moments, relaxation, healing in someone's life." This statement powerfully articulates how mixed-media printmaking functions not only as a communication device but also as a medium of emotional processing and healing.

Such affirmations demonstrate that participants perceive art as an inclusive and culturally resonant mode of addressing mental health, one that can bypass the barriers of stigma and

limited clinical resources. The feedback highlights the dual utility of the artworks as both a public awareness tool and a personal therapeutic aid.

4.4.6 Analysis of Findings (Objective 4)

The findings from the online exhibition indicate that mixed media printmaking was effective in communicating the causes of mental health challenges to diverse audiences. Participants demonstrated emotional engagement with the artworks, identified the mental health themes represented, and related the visual narratives to experiences within their own communities. This suggests that the artworks were able to move beyond aesthetic appreciation and function as tools for awareness creation.

One of the strongest indicators of effectiveness was the emotional response generated by the artworks. Participants frequently described feelings of empathy, concern, recognition, and personal reflection when viewing the prints. Such responses are significant because emotional engagement is often regarded as a prerequisite for awareness and attitude change. Rather than simply presenting information about mental health, the artworks encouraged audiences to connect emotionally with issues such as academic pressure, financial stress, public judgement, and hidden emotional struggles.

The findings further revealed that viewers were generally able to interpret the intended messages of the artworks. Participants identified the causes of mental health challenges represented in the prints and linked them to broader social realities within Ugandan communities. This demonstrates that the combination of printmaking, symbolism, text, colour, and mixed-media materials successfully communicated complex psychological and social experiences in a manner that was accessible to audiences with different educational and professional backgrounds.

The study also found that mixed media printmaking possesses particular strengths as a communication tool because it combines visual, textual, and material elements within a single artwork. Participants noted the impact of symbols, colours, textures, and composition in conveying emotional states and social pressures. The integration of fabric, stitching, collage, and reduction printing techniques contributed to the expressive quality of the artworks and enhanced audience engagement. These findings support the argument that mixed-media approaches can communicate dimensions of experience that may be difficult to express through words alone.

However, the evaluation also identified limitations. Some participants felt that certain artworks relied too heavily on textual elements, reducing opportunities for symbolic interpretation. Others suggested that more imaginative or metaphorical approaches could strengthen audience engagement. These observations indicate that while mixed media printmaking is effective in communicating mental health issues, the balance between clarity and artistic openness remains important. Excessive textual explanation may reduce the interpretive participation of viewers.

The findings therefore suggest that the effectiveness of mixed media printmaking lies not only in its ability to communicate information but also in its capacity to stimulate reflection, discussion, and emotional connection. The artworks created opportunities for audiences to consider mental health challenges from personal, social, and cultural perspectives. In doing so, the prints functioned as both artistic objects and communication tools capable of contributing to mental health awareness within Ugandan communities.

Overall, the evidence from the online exhibition demonstrates that mixed media printmaking can serve as an effective medium for raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges. Its effectiveness is rooted in its ability to combine visual symbolism, material experimentation, emotional resonance, and audience participation into a form of communication that is both accessible and engaging.

4.5 The Major Finding focusing on positive side of mental health

4.5.1 Rest, Reflect, Recharge



Figure 33*:* Shows the Key for the mixed media print developed on the theme of Rest, Reflect, Recharge, photo by Researcher.



Figure 34*:* Shows the mixed media print developed on the Rest, Reflect, Recharge, photo by Researcher.

The audience evaluation revealed that while the artworks successfully communicated the causes of mental health challenges, participants also expressed the importance of promoting coping strategies, resilience, and positive mental health practices. In response to these findings, the researcher developed the major work titled *Rest, Reflect, Recharge*. This artwork serves as the culmination of the studio investigation and synthesizes insights generated throughout the study.

Unlike the preceding artworks, which focused primarily on the causes of mental health challenges such as academic pressure, economic stress, public judgement, time pressure, and concealed struggles, *Rest, Reflect, Recharge* shifts attention towards prevention, self-awareness, and positive mental health. The work therefore extends the conversation from identifying mental health challenges to exploring practical approaches that can support psychological wellbeing within Ugandan communities.

Produced using the largest woodblock created during the study (84.1 × 118 cm) and combined with mixed-media painting techniques, the artwork occupies a central position within the body

of work. Its scale reflects the significance of mental health as a social issue and reinforces the importance of collective responsibility in promoting wellbeing.

The central imagery is a bold black silhouette of a human figure holding their head, a visual metaphor for the weight of mental strain. From the core of this figure emerges a black spiral, expanding outward to signify the ripple effect of everyday actions. This spiral reflects the dual potential of small daily choices to either nurture wellness or escalate distress.

Across the silhouette, striking yellow inscriptions highlight practices that sustain mental health: rest, spirituality, problem-solving, interpersonal relationships, exercise, communication, empathy, nutrition, and critical thinking. The bright yellow, juxtaposed against the dark form, symbolizes clarity, energy, and hope, reinforcing the idea that mental well-being depends on intentional, positive habits.

Surrounding the central figure are smaller silhouettes in reflective and meditative postures, embodying the "3Rs" Rest, Reflect, Recharge. These figures suggest that maintaining positive mental health is not a passive state but an active, conscious process of care and awareness.

This work represents the climax of the series. Whereas the earlier prints documented the pressures undermining mental health, Rest, Reflect, Recharge offers a manifesto for resilience and holistic living. Its scale, technique, and thematic integration position it as both a summation of the research journey and a visual tool for raising awareness about coping strategies. In this way, the work fulfills the study's central aim of using mixed-media printmaking not only to identify the causes of mental health challenges but also to advocate for preventive and healing practices within Ugandan communities.

The findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that mixed-media printmaking can function as an effective tool for raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges within Ugandan communities. Through the integration of research findings, visual symbolism, material experimentation, and audience engagement, the artworks successfully communicated complex emotional and social realities. The audience evaluation further revealed that mixed-media printmaking encourages emotional connection, reflection, and dialogue around mental health issues. The chapter therefore establishes the effectiveness of mixed-media printmaking as both an artistic practice and a communication strategy, providing a foundation for the conclusions and recommendations presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0 Introduction

The discussion interprets how mixed media printmaking contributed to raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District and how it functioned as a visual communication tool for sensitizing audiences about mental health issues The chapter also connects the study to broader social realities particularly the growing mental health crisis in Uganda, where Butabika continues to report being overwhelmed by admissions, especially among young people and university graduates. The discussion highlights the significance of art-based approaches in responding to the current rise in mental health challenges and the limited cultural spaces for open dialogue.

The study identified five major contributors to mental health challenges in Kampala District: academic pressure, time pressure and societal expectations, economic instability, public judgment, and concealed emotional struggles. The study demonstrates that mixed media printmaking can act as both a reflective and communicative platform that gives form to internalized struggles often silenced by stigma. It revealed that that mental health challenges in Kampala are deeply embedded in socio-economic and cultural contexts. The economic and academic pressures reflect Uganda's competitive educational environment and limited employment opportunities, which create cycles of anxiety, self-doubt, and fear of failure particularly among youth. This is indicative of a gap in the education system; knowledge and skill that fail to translate into economic meaning. Further still, public opinion and societal expectations reinforce stigma by discouraging emotional vulnerability, while gendered suppression shows that men and women internalize distress differently due to cultural norms of strength and endurance.

Through the Pragmatic Theory of Art (John Dewey, 1934), these results can be understood as evidence that art is not merely aesthetic but experiential a form of inquiry into lived realities. The artistic process allowed the researcher to translate research findings into visual forms through texture, layering, symbolism, and mixed media experimentation. This aligns with Dewey's view of art as a means of reconstructing experience and generating understanding through creative engagement. Similarly, Constructivist Theory supports the idea that meaning

was co-created between participants and facilitator, as individuals interpreted their own experiences and those of others through collaborative art-making.

In this sense, mixed media printmaking extended beyond image production and functioned as a visual communication strategy. The use of texture, layering, colour, symbols, stitching, and collage enabled complex mental health experiences to be represented in forms that audiences could observe, interpret, and discuss. Audience feedback from the online exhibition demonstrated that viewers were able to recognize themes such as academic pressure, economic hardship, social judgment, concealed struggles, and age-related expectations. This suggests that mixed media printmaking can contribute to public awareness by making invisible psychological and social experiences visible and accessible.

From the thematic analysis and detailed audience feedback, several key deductions can be made. The study underscores the deep entrenchment of mental health challenges within the cultural, social, and economic fabric of Kampala District. These challenges are often masked by coded language, humor, busyness, and external performance. As such, it is a call for a culturally responsive approach to mental health discourse one that recognizes the symbolic, unspoken, and performative dimensions of distress.

Further still, the study justifies the use of mixed-media art as a way of embodying, interpreting, and communicating the complex realities of mental health challenges in Uganda.
First, mixed-media printmaking proves to be a highly effective means of engaging viewers emotionally with mental health challenges. The artworks' ability to evoke empathy, recognition, and shared vulnerability confirms their therapeutic and communicative potential. This aligns with the study's goal of providing practical, culturally relevant outlets for emotional stress release and expression.

Second, while most viewers understood the mental health messages, the study reveals the need for more layered and nuanced approaches to titling and visual storytelling. Encouraging active interpretation rather than direct instruction may deepen viewer engagement and personalize meaning. Third, barriers such as textual overload and literal illustration can detract from emotional resonance and interpretive openness. Artistic strategies that leverage abstract symbolism, textures, and color are likely to be more impactful.

Finally, participants' recommendations to integrate mixed media printmaking with other forms of media and public discourse point to the benefits of multi-modal mental health communication strategies. These deductions collectively demonstrate the promise of mixed-media printmaking as a culturally sensitive, accessible, and multifaceted approach to mental health promotion in Uganda.

5.1 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes new knowledge by demonstrating how mixed media printmaking can be used as a visual communication strategy for raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges within a Ugandan context.

While previous studies have explored art therapy, mental health awareness campaigns, and the use of visual art in addressing social issues, limited research has examined how mixed media printmaking specifically communicates the causes of mental health challenges in Uganda. This study identifies five key contributors to mental health challenges among participants in Kampala District: academic pressure, economic pressure, public opinion and social judgment, time pressure and age-related expectations, and concealed emotional struggles.

The study further demonstrates how research findings can be translated into visual symbols and mixed media printmaking processes to create artworks that communicate complex psychological and social experiences. The use of mind mapping, symbolic development, reduction printmaking, stitching, collage, and text-based imagery provides a practical model for transforming qualitative research findings into visual communication.

The study also contributes evidence that audiences are able to interpret and engage with mental health messages communicated through mixed media printmaking. This confirms the potential of printmaking as a culturally relevant approach for public sensitization and awareness creation around mental health challenges in Uganda.

The knowledge generated therefore extends understanding of how visual art can move beyond aesthetic production and function as a tool for public education, awareness creation, and social dialogue on mental health.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted within Kampala District and involved a relatively small number of participants drawn from selected schools, community groups, and audiences who participated in the online exhibition. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent experiences of individuals living in other regions of Uganda with different social, cultural, and economic contexts.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

1. The study recommends that mixed media printmaking be adopted as a complementary awareness and sensitization tool within schools, universities, community centres, galleries, and cultural institutions. The visual and participatory nature of printmaking provides opportunities for discussing mental health challenges in culturally appropriate and accessible ways.
2. Arts organizations and educational institutions should develop programmes that utilize mixed media printmaking to encourage dialogue around the causes of mental health challenges and reduce stigma associated with mental health discussions.
3. Mental health practitioners and artists should explore collaborative projects that use visual art as a communication strategy for increasing public awareness and understanding of mental health challenges.
4. Future research should expand arts-based mental health awareness initiatives to rural districts and diverse populations in order to examine how different communities respond to visual approaches to mental health communication.
5. Researchers should also explore the use of digital media, public art, animation, and interactive exhibitions alongside printmaking to reach broader audiences and increase engagement with mental health awareness campaigns.
6. Further studies may investigate how mixed media printmaking can be integrated into community-based programmes and educational settings as a tool for reflection, dialogue, and awareness creation.
7. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine the long-term impact of arts-based awareness programmes on public perceptions of mental health challenges and stigma reduction.

5.4 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how mixed media printmaking can be used to raise awareness about the causes of mental health challenges in Kampala District. The findings established that mental health challenges among participants were influenced by interconnected factors including academic pressure, economic pressure and financial instability, time pressure and age-related expectations, public opinion and social judgment, and concealed emotional struggles. These contributors emerged consistently across questionnaires, interviews, workshop observations, and field notes, revealing that mental health challenges are shaped by broader social, cultural, and economic conditions rather than isolated personal experiences.

The study further demonstrated that mixed media printmaking can serve as an effective communication tool for raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges. Through the production of artworks such as Academic Pressure, Economic Pressure, Public Opinion and Social Judgment, Time Pressure and Age-Related Expectations, and Concealed Struggles, research findings were translated into visual symbols, textures, colours, and layered materials that audiences could interpret and discuss. Audience evaluation responses indicated that viewers were generally able to identify the intended themes and relate them to real-life experiences, suggesting that mixed media printmaking can contribute meaningfully to mental health sensitization and public awareness.

The research also showed that the communicative power of mixed media printmaking lies not only in imagery but also in materiality. The integration of texture, collage, stitching, layering, and symbolic forms encouraged emotional engagement and reflection, supporting the view that art can communicate complex social and psychological realities in accessible ways. At the same time, the study identified challenges such as textual overload and overly literal imagery, indicating the importance of balancing clarity with symbolic depth in visual communication.

In terms of contribution to knowledge, this study provides evidence that mixed media printmaking can be used as a culturally relevant approach for raising awareness about the causes of mental health challenges within Ugandan communities. The research demonstrates how findings on the causes of mental health challenges can be transformed into visual narratives that stimulate reflection, dialogue, and awareness. By linking mental health research

with arts-based practice, the study extends existing scholarship on visual communication, community engagement, and mental health awareness in Uganda.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that mixed media printmaking is not only a creative process but also a valuable tool for communicating complex social issues. The research therefore contributes new knowledge on how mixed media printmaking can be used to translate lived experiences into visual forms that promote understanding, dialogue, and awareness of mental health challenges within Ugandan communities.

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Appendix 1:

Questionnaires

Understanding Mental Health and Wellbeing Challenges Among Young Adults in Uganda

Section A: Demographics

Age:
- 21–25
- 26–30
- 31–35

Gender:
- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

Marital status:
- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Other

Occupation:
- Student
- Employed
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Other: _____

Level of education:
- Secondary
- Certificate/Diploma
- Bachelor's degree
- Postgraduate
- Other

Section B: Mental Health Challenges

Over the past year, have you experienced any of the following? (Tick all that apply)
- Depression or prolonged sadness
- Anxiety or panic
- High stress or burnout

- Substance abuse
- Relationship or family issues
- Loneliness
- Suicidal thoughts
- None of the above

What are the major contributors to your mental health challenges? (Tick up to 3)
- Unemployment or financial pressure
- Academic/career stress
- Relationship problems
- Trauma (violence, loss, abuse)
- Social expectations
- Poor access to mental health services
- Other: _____

Have you ever sought professional help for mental or emotional issues?
- Yes
- No
- I wanted to, but couldn't access it

What stops people your age from getting mental health support? (Tick all that apply)
- Stigma/shame
- Cost of services
- Lack of professionals
- Distance to health center
- Not knowing where to go
- Cultural or religious beliefs
- Other: _____

In your opinion, how can mental health and wellbeing be better supported in Uganda? (Open response)

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Challenges Among Ugandan Youth

Section A: Demographics

Gender:
- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

Are you currently:
- In secondary school
- In university/college
- Out of school
- Working
- Other: _____

Region of residence:
- Central
- Eastern
- Northern
- Western
- Other: _____

Section B: Mental Health and Life Challenges

In the past 6 months, how often have you experienced the following?
(Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always)
- Depression or low mood
- Anxiety or fear
- High stress from school/work/family
- Sleeping problems
- Feeling isolated or rejected

What do you believe causes most emotional and mental health issues for youth your age?
(Select up to 3)
- Academic stress
- Peer pressure
- Family conflicts
- Lack of money/job
- Social media or technology
- Substance abuse

- Relationship problems
- Other: _____

Have you ever felt like you needed help for your mental or emotional wellbeing?
- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Did you try to get help or talk to someone?
- Yes (Who?): _____
- No (Why not?): _____

Do you think young people in Uganda are free to talk about mental health?
- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

Why or why not?: _____

What do you think could help you or others feel better mentally and emotionally? (Open answer)

Appendix 2

Interview guide

Interview Guide for Objective 2: Analyzing the Use of Visual Art in Health Communication

Section 1: Background & Experience

1. Could you tell me about your background and experience with visual art or health communication?

2. Please tell us about the art initiatives that you have used visual art to address health topics? please describe them.

3. How would you define the role of visual art in public health education and awareness?

Section 2: Visual Art in Health Awareness

1. Besides your personal art practice, what types of visual art have you seen or used to communicate health messages

2. From your perspective, how effective is visual art in raising awareness about health issues, particularly mental health?

3. Can you share any examples (local, regional, or global) where visual art successfully influenced public understanding or behavior around health challenges?

4. What factors make these art initiatives successful or impactful?

5. Have you noticed any challenges or limitations in using visual art for health communication?

Section 3: Mental Health and Art

1. How do you think mental health issues differ from other health topics in terms of how they can be communicated through art?

2. What are some key themes or messages that visual art should focus on to effectively raise awareness about mental health causes?

3. How can visual art help reduce stigma associated with mental health challenges?

4. What role do cultural symbols, local materials, or traditional styles play in making mental health art resonate with communities?

Section 4: Collaboration & Future Directions

1. How can artists, health professionals, and communities collaborate better to use visual art in mental health awareness?

2. What innovations or new approaches do you see emerging in the use of visual art for health communication?

3. What advice would you give to artists who want to contribute to mental health awareness through their work?

4. What recommendations do you have for improving the use of visual art in health education and awareness campaigns?

Appendix 3

Thematic Coding Sheet of the Exhibition Feedback



Code	Short Description
DEM_Age	Participant's age
DEM_Gender	Participant's gender
DEM_Occ	Occupation or role
DEM_Edu	Education level
Art_Emo	Artwork had emotional impact - Indicate which work (1-5)
Art_Pers	Related to personal experience
Art_Vis	Moved by visual style or technique
Int_Pos	Interpreted as hopeful or positive
Int_Strug	Interpreted as showing struggle or pain
-Msg_Und	Message of artwork understood clearly
-Msg_Unc	Message was unclear or confusing
MH_Clear	Mental health theme came through clearly
-MH_Unclr	Theme not clearly conveyed
MH_Mixed	Mixed clarity — some clear, some unclear
Conf_Content	Confused by content or symbols in artworks
Conf_Layout	Confused by presentation or layout
Sug_Info	Suggested adding more explanation or context
Sug_Clarity	Suggested clearer messaging or display
Sug_Other	Other suggestions (not listed above)
Cmnt_Gen	General comments, feedback, or praise

Themes

1. Demographics
2. Artworks
3. Interpretation
4. Message
5. Mental health
6. Clarity level
7. Suggestions
8. Comments

AM -> Arts Manager.
B -> Bachelors

30

Appendix 4

Google Feedback Form

Participant Questionnaire and Feedback Form

This research aims to assess how effectively mixed media printmaking can communicate mental health and well-being challenges in Uganda. By showcasing five original artworks, the research explores how visual art can raise awareness, reduce stigma, and promote dialogue around mental health.

Through participant engagement, the research evaluates how audiences interpret the artworks and whether the mental health themes are clearly conveyed. The findings will inform how visual arts can be used as a tool for mental health advocacy and communication in culturally relevant ways.

Section A: Demographics

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Occupation: _____

Education level: _____

Section B: Please select your response

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement by selecting a number from 1 to 5.

1: Strongly Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Neutral 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree

The artwork increased my awareness of mental health issues.

1 2 3 4 5

I felt emotionally moved by the artworks.

1 2 3 4 5

The artwork enhanced the impact of the message.

1 2 3 4 5

I found the content relatable to my own experience or community.

1 2 3 4 5

Section C: Open-ended Questions

Which artwork impacted you the most, and why?

What is your interpretation of the artworks?

What message do you take away from the exhibition?

Do you feel that the theme of mental health clearly comes through in the artworks? Please explain.

Was there anything you found confusing or unclear?

What can be done to convey the theme of mental health better? Please explain.

Any other comments or suggestions:

Appendix 5

N	*S*	*N*	*S*	*N*	*S*
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	1000000	384

Note.—*N* is population size. *S* is sample size.

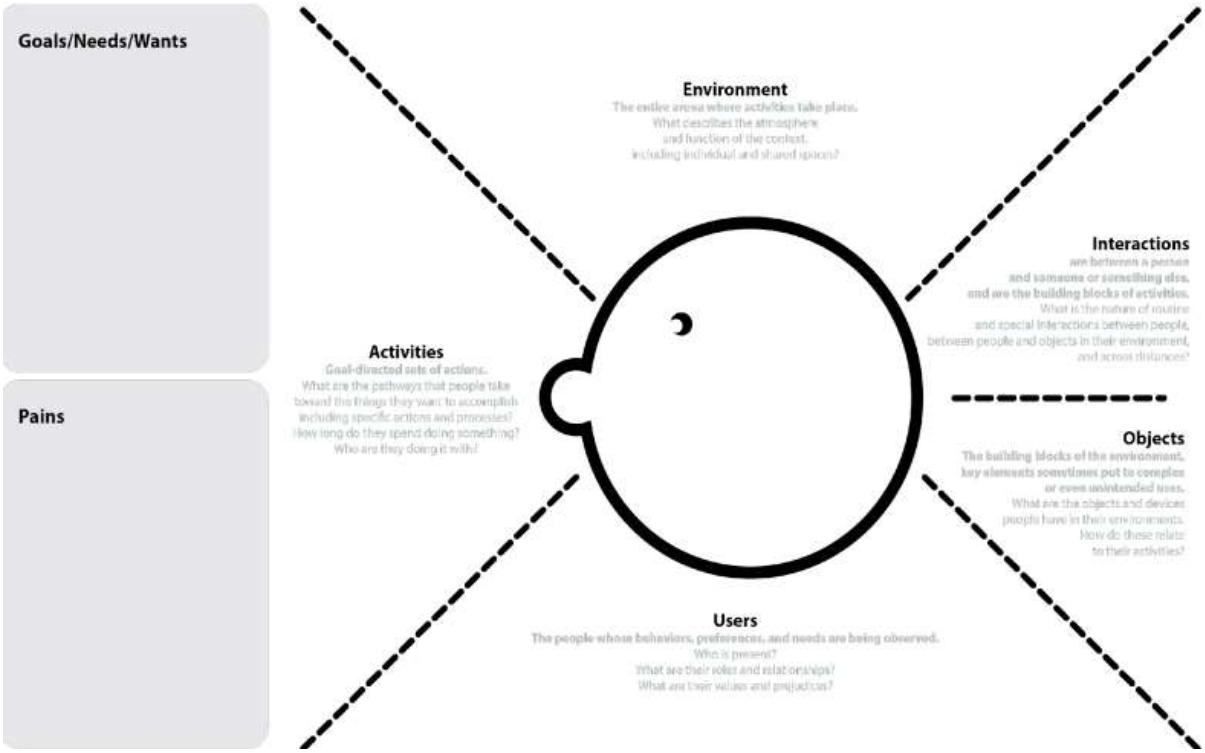
Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970

Appendix 6

DATE:	PROJECT NAME:	TYPE OF RESEARCH:
TIME:	RESEARCHER NAME:	

Activities	Environments	Interactions	Objects	Users

Appendix 7


Goals/Needs/Wants
Pains
Environment
The entire arena where activities take place.
What describes the atmosphere
and function of the context,
including individual and shared spaces?
Interactions
are between a person
and someone or something else,
and are the building blocks of activities.
What is the nature of routine
and special interactions between people,
between people and objects in their environment,
and across distances?
Activities
Goal-directed sets of actions.
What are the pathways that people take
toward the things they want to accomplish
including specific actions and processes?
How long do they spend doing something?
Who are they doing it with?
Objects
The building blocks of the environment,
key elements sometimes put to complex
or even unintended uses.
What are the objects and devices
people have in their environments.
How do those relate
to their activities?
Users
The people whose behaviors, preferences, and needs are being observed.
Who is present?
What are their roles and relationships?
What are their values and prejudices?

Appendix 8. Makerere University Fieldwork introduction letter.

MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

P.O. Box 7062, Kampala Uganda

Tel: +256 – (0)414 531423

Email:

COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING, DESIGN, ART, AND TECHNOLOGY
MARGARET TROWELL SCHOOL OF INDUSTRIAL AND FINE ARTS
MASTER'S COORDINATOR

24th June 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: INTRODUCTION LETTER FOR KAJEBE JACOB JOSHUA Reg. No. 2023/HD08/27976U

Reference is made to the above.

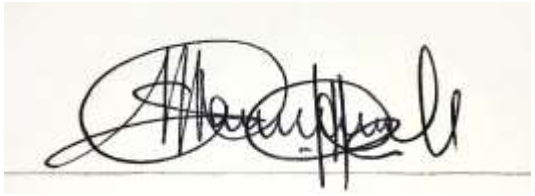
This is to introduce to you candidate Kajebe Jacob Joshua who is a Master's of Fine Art Student at the Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art (**MTSIFA**), College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (**CEDAT**), Makerere University. He is pursuing on a research topic *Mixed Media Printmaking as a Tool in Raising Awareness about the Causes of Mental Health Challenges in Kampala District.*

Jacob is a second-year student on the Master's program who is required to engage in fieldwork to research, investigate and analyse various aspects in the community that may be relevant for his study.

Therefore, purpose of this letter is to kindly request you to avail him with any necessary information and any support that you deem necessary to his study.

I will be grateful if he is able to accomplish this task and in case of any challenges kindly refer back to me for any more information as the Master's coordinator at MTSIFA.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Ronald Mpindi Kibudde
MAFA Coordinator, MTSIFA
mpindi.kibu103@gmail.com+ 256-755689413

Appendix 9: Consent Letter from Faces Up-Uganda.

FACESUP
Who We Always Look Up To

Makerere University
Department of Industrial Art and Applied Design
The Margaret Trowel School of Industrial and Fine Art

29 June 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: ACCEPTANCE OF KAJEBE JACOB JOSHUA TO CONDUCT FIELD RESEARCH AND FACILITATE WORKSHOPS

This letter serves to confirm that **Kajebe Jacob Joshua**, Registration No. **2023/HD08/27976U**, a Master's of Fine Art student at the **Margaret Trowell School of Industrial and Fine Art (MTSIFA), College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (CEDAT), Makerere University**, has been accepted by **Faces Up Uganda** to undertake field research activities with our organisation.

As part of his Master's research, titled **"Mixed Media Printmaking as a Tool in Raising Awareness about the Causes of Mental Health Challenges in Kampala District,"** Jacob will engage with selected participants through research, observation, interaction and practical workshop activities.

Faces Up Uganda has therefore agreed to provide him with the necessary support and access, within the organisation's capacity and guidelines, to facilitate a series of **creative and mixed-media printmaking workshops** as part of his field research. The workshops will provide an opportunity for participants to engage in creative processes while allowing Jacob to document and analyse relevant experiences and observations for his academic study.

The research and workshop activities will be conducted in consultation with the relevant staff and participants of Faces Up Uganda and in accordance with the organisation's procedures and any applicable ethical requirements.

We appreciate Jacob's interest in using art and creative practice as part of his research and wish him success in completing his Master's study.

Yours faithfully,

SSEKITO KALULE EMMANUEL
Founder/CEO

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M:+256-705859110
E: admin@facesup.org
W: www.facesup.org
A: P.O.Box104730, GPO, Kampala

HOLIDAY PROGRAM					
August WED 21	**Age**	**FRI 23**	**Age**	**SAT 24**	
Illustration	11 below	Photography (Nyende)	12 above	Art for psychosocial support (Kajebe)	12 above
Printmaking	12 above	Story Telling (Mirembe)	11 below	Design for change	12 above
WED 28		**FRI 30**		**September SAT 1**	
Illustration Drawing	12 above	Computer study/design (Kamanyire)	12 above	Design for change (Ssekitto)	12 above
Printmaking(kajebe)	11 below	Construction/Lego	11 below		
Tailoring (Wasswa)	12 above			Art for psychosocial support (Grace)	11 below
WED 4		**FRI 6**		**SAT 7**	
Collage art (Namirimo)	11 below	Photography (Ethal)	12 above	Art for psychosocial support (Mirembe)	12 above
Printmaking (Kajebe)	12 above	Computer study/design (Nyakoojo)	12 above	Design for change (Kamanyire)	12 above
Art for psychosocial support (Ssekitto)	12 above	Drawing and painting (Grace)	11 below	Clay work (Namirimo)	11 below
WED 10		**FRI 13**		**SAT 14**	
Illustration	12 above	Photography (Nyakoojo)	12 above	Design for change (Ssekitto)	12 above
Printmaking (Kajebe)	11 below	Art for psychosocial support (Ninsiima)	12 above	Art for psychosocial support (Grace)	11 below

Appendix 10

SCHOOLS OUT REACH PROGRAM			
NAME OF SCHOOL	**DATE**	**TIME**	**COMMENTS**
NAMUNGOONA KIGOBE PRIMARY SCHOOL	01- JULY-2024	2PM TO 5:30PM	DISPAS team will visit and take part in the activities at school
MASANAFU SECONDARY SCHOOL	03- JULY-2024	2PM TO 5:30PM	
NAMUNGOONA PROGRESSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL - S.2	05- JULY-2024	2PM TO 5:30PM	
NAMUNGOONA PROGRESSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL – S1	10- JULY-2024	2PM TO 5:30PM	
NAMUNGOONA KIGOBE PRIMARY SCHOOL	12- JULY-2024	2PM TO 5:30PM	
EXCELL SECONDARY SCHOOL KAWAALA	19- JULY-2024	2PM TO 5:30PM	
ST. FLORENCE SECONDARY SCHOOL KASUBI	24- JULY-2024	3:40PM TO 5:30PM	