

AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF RAP MUSIC ON MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS IN UGANDA: A CASE STUDY OF MUKONO, UGANDA

PRECIOUS GIFT ALOYO

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM, MEDIA AND
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I Precious Gift Aloyo declare that this is my original work, and is not plagiarized or been submitted to any other institution for any award.

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APPROVAL

The student, Precious Gift Aloyo's dissertation report is original, not published or presented to any other institution for any award.

I hereby give my approval that this dissertation be submitted to the School of Journalism, Media and Communication, Uganda Christian University (UCU)

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Date:12/06/26.....

Dr. Samuel Kazibwe

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my beloved parents, who have been my bedrock from day one. They've shown so much love and support and I do not take that for granted.

I also dedicate this to all the men in my life and every other man that comes across this research paper. Remember to take care of your mental health at all times.

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the effect of rap lyrics on men's mental health awareness in Uganda. It uses Mukono District as a case study and as a point of reference for the author. Despite an increased number of Ugandan men facing mental health difficulties, societal pressures to define masculinity and mental illness as something "masculine", the stigma attached to living with such conditions, lack of service provision, as well as limited access (or lack thereof in some cases), make for a reluctance toward open discussions with men seeking help or help-seeking behavior. Although rap music is widely popular among young men and often deals with these issues on themes of struggle, coping effectively in the face of suffering, mental illness, such as trauma and identity problems, very few studies have been used to explore its impact on mental illness awareness within the Ugandan context. A qualitative case study design was used in this study targeting young men aged 18–40 years living in Mukono District. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis of selected Ugandan and international rap songs. A total of 50 male participants were purposively and snowball sampled. A thematic analysis was conducted to explore men's perceptions of mental health, their exposure to rap music, and the influence of rap lyrics on mental health awareness, attitudes, and stigma reduction. The findings suggest that rap music serves as a powerful yet complex communication tool. For many listeners, it creates opportunities to engage with conversations about emotional struggles, encourages openness, and helps normalize vulnerability. However, its influence is not uniform. While some rap songs promote self-reflection, emotional expression, and healthy coping mechanisms, others may reinforce harmful stereotypes or unhealthy ways of dealing with psychological challenges. The study highlights the potential of rap music as a culturally relevant and accessible platform for advancing mental health advocacy among men. By connecting with audiences through relatable experiences and language, rap music can contribute to greater awareness and understanding of mental health issues. These findings contribute to both communication and public health scholarship by demonstrating how popular culture can be leveraged to support men's psychological well-being in Uganda. Furthermore, the study offers practical insights for mental health practitioners, musicians, media organizations, and policymakers seeking to develop more targeted, engaging, and effective mental health awareness initiatives.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive foundation for the study. It introduces the background, including the historical, theoretical, and contextual perspectives, the problem statement, general and specific objectives, research questions, scope of the study, significance, and the conceptual framework. The study examines the influence of rap music on mental health awareness among men in Mukono.

1.1 Background

Mental health has ever been one of the major public health issues globally. Mental health is a state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities (World Health Organization (WHO, 2022). Mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, stress, and substance use, persist and continue to affect millions of individuals around the world and men are especially likely to experience different barriers to identifying and accessing help for mental health concerns.

Awareness globally about men's mental health issues is growing as men suffer from rising rates of high suicide, substance use problems and emotional neglect, coupled with untreated mental illness in every country. Traditional gender roles often portray men as tough and independent, stoically emotionally tough and self-sufficient, thus challenging for many men who often have mental problems and may refuse mental health professionals or care professionals (Smith & Mouzon, 2014). This means that mental health issues between men in the community are frequently ignored, until it shows up as destructive practices or extreme mental health problems. At present, mental health remains an under-addressed public health issue: Uganda's prevalence rates just so increased year after year (Lammen et al., 2019). The country's mental health care system is plagued by problems such as insufficient funding, fewer mental health providers and widespread stigma attached to mental illness (Kigozi et al., 2010).

Yet research shows that many Ugandans continue to view mental illness through cultural and social lenses that inhibit straightforward talk or the seeking of assistance for their problems. These issues are particularly acute for men who are under social pressure to appear strong and independent. At the same time, music has become a powerful tool of conversation, education, and social change. Music has the power to set the mood, determine the mindset, and shape the opinions of people, creating emotional links. In different musical genres, the rap music industry is known, by many, for its medium of narrative, reflection, and personal reflection. Rapping takes an increasingly heavy focus on poverty, violence, identity, relationships, trauma, and mental health: the genre is a potent means of raising concerns about social issues.

At a global level, including several artists who have made their music about depression, anxiety, loneliness, trauma, and emotional vulnerability. Such messages hold a promise to combat negative stereotypes, stimulate dialogue, and mitigate stigma on mental health issues. Rap music has been gaining traction in Uganda, mainly among young men, and has gained traction in general, but has not received the research attention required to address mental health awareness. This study thus investigates the effects of rap music on mental health awareness of men in Mukono District, Uganda. The research will investigate how men interpret the messages related to mental health conveyed through rap music and whether rap can function as a means for raising awareness and reducing stigma in the area of mental health issues.

1.1.1 Historical Perspective

In the 1900s, resounding names like Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G, DMX, A Tribe Called Quest, shook the international music scene with catchy beats and relatable lyrics. Amidst the common topics surrounding rap music, sex, drugs, and money, deep trauma and vulnerability as often observed in some of the hit rap songs of that time. Songs like “Sippin” by DMX and “I feel Like Dying” by Lil Wayne topped the charts as soon as they hit the airwaves. With some brushing them off as just a banger, and others looking deep at the reflections of their own daily struggles,

reflected in rap. These songs highlight mental health struggles, raw battles with drug addictions, manic depression, and trauma these artists faced during that time.

Specifically looking at Tupac's "So Many Tears" released in 1995, it is noticed how he utterly pours out himself on this track, sharing his innermost struggles as he awaits his prison sentence (Genesis Behavioral Services, 2026). One of the most striking lines from this banger is "Now I'm lost and I'm weary, so many tears. I'm suicidal so don't stand near me," a reflection of a man at the edge, traumatized by the triad of unfortunate events concurrently occurring in his life within the same period of time. During the 1900's in the US, life for a black man living in the ghetto was defined by systemic obstacles and extreme resilience. From navigating underfunded schools, to increased exposure to crime and environmental hazards (PBS NewsHour, 2016).

In Uganda, rap, also known as 'Luga Flow', a mixture of hip hop beats and Luganda, one of the local dialects in the country. Artists like GNL Zamba, Navio and Ruyonga expanded the genre from what the co-founders of rap in Uganda had defined it to be. Co-founders like Babaluku, and the Bataka Uprising, used hip hop as a method of social activism, engaging youth in the ghetto, offering guidance, mentorship and safe spaces for them to share their struggles (The Ugandan Boy Talk Show, 2025).

In recent history, we see artists like Ruyongs, Naviyo, and Spyda MC, maintaining their streak, while new artists like Tucker HD, Barna and Jo Kare Ni are taking the rap scene by storm. Spyda MC in collaboration with Niinaa MC and Nyonjo released a track in 2023 entitled 'Tebitulya.' This track is a deeply compelling and catchy piece that touches on the resilience one needs to be able to survive Kampala, the street smartness required and the daily hustle of one living in Kampala. 'Tebitulya' is roughly translated to "they don't consume us" or "they don't bring us down," referring to the harshness of life in Kampala and the people therein; it won't break him. A subtle way of highlighting the struggles he faced while growing and assuring the world and himself that he won't be struck down because of the harsh days.

1.2 Problem Statement

Mental health disorders still affect a large portion of the population of Uganda, but awareness and access to mental health care services are scarce. Men are vulnerable to this because social and

cultural standards that discourage them from sharing their feelings, talk about mental distress or getting professional assistance in all manner of ways are widely prevalent. As consequence, many men suffer from mental health illnesses in silence and are at a higher risk for depression, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, and suicide. Although many awareness programs have been introduced to tackle mental health issues, the communication methodologies have not necessarily targeted men or had communication that meets the needs of male populations. Rap music has taken off in recent years, and many young men hear lyrics about the emotional difficulties and resilience through many themes of identity and personal experiences. However, there is little research that investigates rap music's role in promoting mental health awareness among men in Uganda. Yet research remains lacking on how rap music affects men's perception or awareness of mental health issues. Or perhaps more accurately, how popular culture can be used as a way of communication? The present study aims therefore at finding out whether rap music has a positive or negative effect on men's mental health awareness in Mukono District, Uganda. The purpose of this study is to explore the contribution of rap music to men's awareness of mental health.

1.4 Research Objectives

To investigate the impact of rap music on awareness of mental health among men in Mukono District, Uganda.

1.4.1 Specific Objectives

1. To explore men's views on mental health problems in Mukono District.
2. To investigate the impact of rap music in men's awareness of mental health and views on mental health in general.
3. To explore the capacity of rap music as a strategy to break down the mental health stigma of men's suffering.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are men's feelings of mental health challenges in Mukono District?
2. How does rap music communicate messages related to mental health?
3. How does rap music affect men's awareness and attitudes toward mental health?
4. What potential does rap music have in mental health stigma reduction among men?

1.6 Scope of Study

Geographical scope

The research will be carried out in Mukono District, Uganda.

Content Scope

This study will be done on rap music and mental health awareness in men. Here it will hone in lyrical data as well as the listeners' opinion, mental health messaging, stigma reduction, and awareness creation.

Time Scope

The research will analyze contemporary rap music and rates of mental health awareness from 2020 to 2025. First, as the authors of this paper write, the study will build on existing academic understandings of the music and mental health communication in Uganda. Second, psychological/mental health practitioners and social organizations can potentially use the findings to inform their strategies to craft new awareness campaigns for male audiences. Third, musicians and content creators learn how their art can help promote mental health and stigma reduction. Finally, those stakeholders and communicators can see potential openings to incorporate popular culture in public health communication strategies.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This research will be influenced by Social Cognitive Theory, Social Marketing Theory and Stigma Reduction Theory. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977)

According to Social Cognitive Theory, people acquire attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors through observation and imitation. Listening to positive messages about mental health and talking about mental illness may come from relatable stories (relatable narratives or personal experiences) in rap music. Social Marketing Theory (Andreasen, 1995)

Social Marketing Theory is the application of marketing principles to influence behaviors that benefit the consumer and the organization, using behavioral change techniques to increase the utility of an individual or brand in society. For its use among the youths, rap music can be a suitable medium to convey information on mental health and to encourage positive behavior change in individuals. Stigma Reduction Theory (Corrigan & Watson, 2002)

Stigma Reduction Theory discusses how the stigmatization of mental health issues can be transformed due to education, learning, and conversation. Rap music can also be part of the solution in combating stigma by breaking down the stigma of mental illness and making it acceptable for people to feel bad about it because it's "normal to be depressed."

1.8 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable:

Rap Music

- Mental health messages
- Personal storytelling & stories
- Artist influence
- Emotional expression

Dependent Variable:

Mental Health Awareness Among Men

- Knowledge of mental health issues
- Attitudes about mental health
- Help-seeking behavior
- Reduction of stigma

Intervening Variables:

- Cultural beliefs
- Education level
- Media exposure
- Age
- Peer influence

Within this framework, the relationship between rap music and mental health awareness among men will be examined. The relationship could be strengthened or weakened by several variables that intervene, such as cultural beliefs, education level, media exposure, age, and peer influence.

The framework posits that rap music functions as the independent variable, shaping men's awareness, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors concerning mental health, which constitute the dependent variable. By communicating experiences, emotions, and social messages through its lyrics, rap music can influence how men interpret mental health issues and their willingness to engage in conversations and help-seeking behaviors related to mental well-being. The independent variable is rap music, which, to an extent, influences mental health awareness among men. The study focuses on three key aspects of rap music:

- **Mental Health Messages:** Lyrics that discuss depression, anxiety, stress, trauma, suicide, or emotional well-being can educate listeners about mental health challenges.
- **Personal Storytelling and Stories:** Many rap artists share personal experiences of struggle, resilience, and emotional hardship. These narratives may help listeners relate to mental health issues being rapped about, comparing the stories to their own experiences.

- **Emotional Expression:** Rap music provides a platform for expressing emotions such as pain, anger, fear, and vulnerability. Exposure to such expression may help normalize conversations about mental health among men.

On the other hand, the dependent variable is mental health awareness among men, which refers to men's understanding and perceptions of mental health issues. It is measured through:

- **Knowledge of Mental Health Issues:** The extent to which a man understands mental health conditions, from their causes and symptoms, to their effect on an individual effects.
- **Attitudes About Mental Health:** Men's beliefs and perceptions regarding mental health and mental illness.
- **Help-Seeking Behavior:** Willingness to seek professional or social support when experiencing mental health challenges.

The relationship between rap music and mental health awareness may not be direct in all cases, at all times. Several factors can affect how rap music affects listeners, including:

- **Cultural Beliefs:** Norms surrounding masculinity and mental health may affect how men interpret mental health messages in rap music.
- **Education Level:** Individuals with higher levels of education may better understand and engage better with mental health content.
- **Media Exposure:** Exposure to other forms of media discussing mental health can reinforce or compete with messages found in rap music.
- **Age:** Different age groups may relate differently to rap music and mental health discussions.
- **Peer Influence:** Social networks can shape attitudes and perceptions toward both rap music and mental health, affecting how messages are received, perceived and retained.

The framework proposes that rap music influences mental health awareness among men by exposing them to mental health messages, personal stories, and artist perspectives. These elements can add to one's knowledge base, foster positive attitudes, encourage help-seeking behavior, and reduce stigma amongst men. However, the extent of this influence depends on intervening factors such as cultural beliefs, education, media exposure, age, and peer influence.

This conceptual framework is founded on the understanding that media, particularly rap music, can significantly shape the way people think, feel, and act. As a genre that often draws from personal experiences, social realities, and emotional struggles, rap music provides a relatable and influential platform for discussing topics that are frequently overlooked or stigmatized, such as mental health. Through lyrics that share stories of resilience, vulnerability, and personal challenges, rap music can increase men's awareness of mental health issues, encourage more positive attitudes, and help break down stereotypes that discourage open conversations about emotional well-being.

At the same time, the influence of these messages is not the same for everyone. Factors such as age, level of education, cultural beliefs, exposure to other forms of media, and peer influences can affect how listeners interpret and respond to the messages conveyed in rap music. These factors may either strengthen or limit the impact of rap music on mental health awareness and attitudes, shaping the extent to which individuals embrace the ideas and messages presented through the genre.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a literature review on mental health awareness, men's mental health, rap music as a communication tool, and rap music and mental health awareness. By pulling perspectives from the global, African, and Ugandan arenas, the review aims to provide a nuanced and holistic understanding of the study topic. The chapter further specifies limitations in current literature necessary for the present study.

2.2 Concept of Mental Health Awareness

Mental health awareness is the recognition, understanding, and acceptance of mental health conditions. The World Health Organization (2022) suggests that mental health is an integral part of overall health and well-being; it determines how people think, feel and behave. Mental health awareness attempts to spread awareness in the public sphere of mental health conditions, reduce the stigma and encourage people to take the right path when they need help. Mental health awareness has become one of the most well-known public health issues globally. As per the WHO, an estimated one in eight people around the world live with a mental health disorder, placing mental health at number one on the agenda of public health issues for the twenty-first century. The increasing awareness in many countries, the presence of more publications and various public education campaigns etc. has led to increased understanding about the mental health issues. Despite a rising awareness at the global level, mental health is very much stigmatized in several developing countries. And in a lot of communities, mental illness is the product of weakness, spiritual punishment or witchcraft, or just plain failure. These misconceptions discourage clients from seeking professional help which can result in delayed diagnosis and therapy. Data from the Development Research and Training (2022) have indicated that mental health disorders persist for a high percentage of the Ugandan population. The research also found that there are a majority of people in Uganda who suffer from depression, anxiety, stress-induced illness and substance abuse.

Even more so, stigma, lack of services and a lack of awareness prevent many from seeking support for someone who might benefit from mental wellbeing. Mental health programs have a critical role in helping prevent these challenges in that educational, early intervention and help-seeking interventions can significantly improve knowledge levels and increase awareness throughout an organization. Initiatives involving awareness can also increase public understanding of and perception toward mental illness and facilitate improved mental health status. Public health of mental health is increasingly a public health issue in Uganda. According to Kigozi et al. (2010), the mental health care system in Uganda has a high number of difficulties like insufficient funding, a shortage of mental health professionals, limited services and outdated laws about mental health. These difficulties have obstructed the country's capacity to meet growing mental health challenges. Although Uganda has made some headway in integrating mental health services in its primary care facilities, mental health still ranks as one of the sectors with least funding from the health system. Studies show that less than one percent of the national health budget is allocated to psychiatric services, which results in service delivery failures. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened the importance of mental healthcare awareness in Uganda. Gottert et al. (2022) found that social isolation, economic uncertainty, and health-related fears led to greater psychological distress in many people, particularly men. The pandemic highlighted pre-existing vulnerabilities in mental health care delivery systems and highlighted the critical importance of novel approaches to addressing mental health communication. Government agencies, NGOs and development partners have been launching awareness campaigns which have contributed to raising awareness of mental health. Instead, many of these campaigns continue to focus on general people and neglect the specific experiences and communication preferences of men.

2.3 Men's Mental Health

Mental health in men is a term that relates to the mental state of men and boys. It is about how men deal with stress, create relationships, develop their decision-making skills and handle emotional issues during their lives. Men have historically been neglected in conversations around mental health. Gendered ideas promote men to be strong, independent and emotionally in control. Many expect men to shut their feelings up and steer clear of counselling when they're in psychological distress as well. As Smith and Mouzon (2014) point out, traditional masculine

attitudes also inhibit open conversations regarding males' emotions. These norms also play a role in men's lower seeking of help even though many men are reported to struggle with extreme mental illness. Studies also suggest that psychological distress more often manifests in men by aggression or drug and alcohol abuse (SUD) or risk-taking behaviour or withdrawing from society, as well as through aggression and alcohol or drugs rather than direct emotional expression. Thus, mental health problems in men may go unnoticed or unacknowledged. The importance of mental health problems for the health of men Baker (2018) insists that due to the significant implications of men's mental health among men for families, communities and society, researchers, practitioners and policy makers can work even more to bring more attention to the needs of men's mental health. Among men, poor mental health is associated with higher rates of violence, relationship breakdowns and substance abuse, and suicide.

2.4 Men's Mental Health in Uganda

In Uganda, the issue of male mental health still faces less attention as compared to the issue of women and children. While many services are addressing maternal health, child protection, gender-based violence and women empowerment, less attention has been directed towards men's psychological well-being. Gottert et al. (2022) suggest, numerous Ugandan men are experiencing major emotional and psychological pressures related to financial burden due to economic problems, job loss, unemployment and pressures, family expectations and social norms, joblessness and job strain are strong socio-emotional challenges for many Ugandan men. But cultural norms discourage men from feeling vulnerable or seeking professional help from men. Most Ugandan communities still link masculinity with strength, emotional resilience and self-sufficiency. As a result, for men dealing with depression, anxiety, stress, or trauma, sharing those experiences can be hesitant as they may fear being judged or mocked by others. Untreated mental health problems associated with men also play a role in things such as substance addiction, domestic violence, risky sexual activities, and familial dysfunction, studies indicate. Those results not only have individual men's consequences, but also social and economic ones overall. Not sufficient man-oriented mental health awareness programs are available across the board; hence, there is a need for the design of innovative communication strategy, accessible to men in an environment that is acceptable and relatable to men.

2.5 Rap Music as a Communication Tool

Music is a powerful means of communication, education and social change, something that many people have long been familiar with. Music, unlike traditional forms of communication, uses lyrics, rhythm, emotion, and storytelling to communicate messages that resonate with people. Rap originated in the U.S. African American community in the 1970s and, over the years, has developed into an international cultural phenomenon. Rap includes rhythmic speech, storytelling and social commentary. Rap musicians often use rap to talk about individual lives, social problems, politics, identity, community issues and many others. With the help of common narratives and emotional representation, rap artists have the power to change attitudes, subvert expectations, and ignite public discourse. Rap music is so popular with young people in Uganda. In Uganda, rap music is commonly consumed as a way of reaching other youth. Ugandan rap acts address issues such as poverty, economic problems, unemployment, corruption, relationships, identity and social injustice. Because of widespread availability and accessibility, rap has a particular potential to serve as an effective medium by which mental health messages are transmitted. The persuasive effect of rap music can be comprehended using Social Cognitive Theory, a theory that states that people learn about behaviors and attitudes by observing and associating with individuals in the role model role. Audiences will connect to musicians that represent their own lives, so messages expressed via music will influence attitudes and behaviors.

2.6 Rap Music and Mental Health Awareness

Studies show that emotional regulation, stress reduction, self-expression and psychological well-being are influenced by music. Music may provide comfort, inspiration, motivation, and emotional reflection. Kendra (2024) posits that music can be a beneficial medium to improve mental health through stress reduction and improvement in mood or emotional expression, as well as enhancing social connection. Music serves as an outlet for people to express difficult emotions and experiences. Considering music narratives, especially rap music, there are more meaningful avenues for talking about mental health than most social media. Many contemporary rap artists talk about things like depression, anxiety, loneliness and trauma or grief, not to mention resilience. This type of conversation helps to destigmatize emotional vulnerability, and in the process helps to normalize health discussion. Russell (2021) observes the fact that rap has become an

increasingly appropriate means for reducing stigma for mental illness. In talking about personal struggles, artists make it evident to listeners that mental health problems are common but that it is okay and incredibly beneficial to seek help. Studies based in the Western world have shown that exposure to rap music with positive mental health messages can facilitate awareness, promote empathy, and improve help-seeking behavior. One area that the literature does not, although is to the contrary, directly address, is the issue of how rap music can promote negative behaviors by encouraging violence, substance use or unhealthy coping strategies (and the impact of each form of rap on the development of a negative or damaging way of living). These mixed results indicate that the effect of rap music on mental health awareness may be influenced primarily by lyrical content, audience interpretation and social context.

2.7 Theoretical Review

This study is guided by three key theories: **Social Cognitive Theory**, **Social Marketing Theory**, and **Stigma Reduction Theory**. Together, these theories help explain how rap music can shape the way men understand and respond to mental health issues. They show that people learn in diverse ways; from formal education, and also from the media they consume, the voices they trust, and the conversations happening in their everyday environments. In this case, rap music becomes an important space where ideas about mental health are shared, challenged, and understood in new ways.

2.7.1 Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Bandura (1977), explains that people learn by watching others. We often pick up attitudes and behaviors by observing individuals we admire, especially when we see them being rewarded, respected, or accepted by society. The theory also introduces the idea of **self-efficacy**, which is basically a person's belief in their ability to handle situations or make certain changes in their lives.

In the context of this study, rap artists can strongly influence how listeners think about mental health. Many rappers share personal stories about depression, anxiety, trauma, stress, or emotional

struggles in their music. For listeners, especially young men, these artists often feel relatable or even inspirational. When they openly talk about mental health, it can make listeners realize that these experiences are more common than they may have thought.

This matters because men often grow up in environments where talking about emotions is discouraged, looked at as ‘weak’ or just ignored. So, when influential artists show vulnerability, it can quietly challenge those norms. It may help listeners feel more at ease, acknowledging their own struggles and even encourage them to seek help when needed.

At the same time, this theory doesn’t explain everything. Even if someone learns positive attitudes from music, real-life factors like cultural expectations, access to healthcare, and financial limitations can still affect whether they act on that knowledge.

2.7.2 Social Marketing Theory

Social Marketing Theory (Andreasen, 1995) suggests that communication can be a powerful tool for encouraging positive social change. Unlike traditional marketing, which focuses on promoting products and services, social marketing aims to influence behaviors and attitudes that contribute to individual and community well-being.

A central idea of this theory is that people are more likely to pay attention to and act on messages that come through channels they trust and regularly engage with. For many young people, rap music serves as one of those channels. Beyond being a form of entertainment, rap often reflects lived experiences, personal struggles, social realities, and emotions that resonate deeply with listeners.

In the context of this study, rap music provides a unique platform for raising awareness about mental health. When artists openly discuss topics such as emotional well-being, depression, anxiety, coping with stress, or seeking help, they make these conversations more accessible and relatable. Rather than receiving information through formal awareness campaigns or educational programs, audiences encounter these messages through music they already enjoy and connect with.

As a result, mental health issues may feel less unfamiliar, intimidating, or stigmatized. The stories and experiences shared through lyrics can help listeners recognize their own struggles and

encourage more open discussions about mental health. However, while increased awareness is an important first step, it does not automatically lead to behavior change. Factors such as limited access to mental health services, financial constraints, cultural beliefs, and fear of judgment may still prevent individuals from seeking the support they need, even when they understand the importance of doing so.

2.7.3 Stigma Reduction Theory

Stigma Reduction Theory (Corrigan & Watson, 2002) explains how negative attitudes toward mental illness can be challenged and changed. Many people grow up hearing that mental health problems are signs of weakness, failure, or something to be ashamed of. These beliefs can create fear and silence, making it difficult for people to talk openly about what they are going through or to seek help when they need it.

The theory argues that stigma decreases when people are exposed to accurate information, real-life experiences, and positive representations of mental health. Hearing personal stories helps people realize that mental health challenges are not rare or abnormal; they are part of the human experience and can affect anyone.

This is where rap music can play an important role. Many rap artists speak honestly about their emotions, struggles, trauma, anxiety, depression, and other mental health experiences. Because these stories come from voices that listeners admire and relate to, they can feel more authentic and powerful than traditional awareness campaigns. Hearing an artist openly discuss emotional pain can help listeners see mental health issues as something that deserves understanding and support rather than judgment.

For men especially, this can be significant. In many societies, men are often expected to appear strong, independent, and emotionally reserved. Rap music that embraces vulnerability can challenge these expectations and make it feel more acceptable for men to express their feelings, ask for help, and support others who are struggling.

However, changing attitudes is only one part of the solution. Even when stigma decreases, people may still face barriers such as limited mental health services, high costs, lack of information about

where to get help, or social pressures that discourage treatment. Reducing stigma is therefore an important step, but it must be accompanied by practical support and accessible care.

2.7.4 Bringing the Theories Together

When considered together, these three theories help explain why rap music can be an influential tool for promoting mental health awareness among men. Social Cognitive Theory highlights the role of artists as influential figures whose words, attitudes, and behaviors can shape the beliefs of their listeners. Through their music, artists can model healthier ways of understanding and talking about mental health. Social Marketing Theory adds another layer by showing how rap music serves as a trusted and engaging platform for communication. Because many listeners already connect with rap on a personal level, messages about mental health can be delivered in a way that feels relatable rather than formal or instructional. Stigma Reduction Theory helps explain how these messages can contribute to changing attitudes over time. By sharing personal experiences and normalizing conversations about emotional struggles, rap artists can help reduce the shame, fear, and misconceptions that often surround mental health issues.

Together, these theories suggest that rap music is beyond just entertainment. It can be a powerful medium for education, awareness, and social change, helping men better understand mental health, feel more comfortable discussing their experiences, and become more open to seeking support when needed.

2.8 Research Gap

The current research reflects an increasing awareness of mental health, men's mental health, and the impact of music on social attitudes. But studies have mainly been taken in Western nations, where cultural understandings of masculinity, mental health and music vary widely from the context in Uganda. Additionally, although literature reviewed has addressed music as a therapeutic tool, limited research has explored rap music as culture in mental health awareness among Ugandans. As discussed earlier, the majority of studies in Uganda have been limited to delivering a mental health service and stigma reduction, and general awareness and little attention has been

paid to how popular culture and music has been used. The following study seeks to fill this gap and to answer why rap music influences mental health awareness among men in Mukono district in Uganda, by examining the impact of this specific area on their mental health. The results of this study are expected to extend the knowledge base on communications literature and will offer guidelines for creative approaches for mental health promotion for men.

2.9 Conclusion

Men remain disadvantaged in understanding and dealing with mental health problems as men remain culturally and socially conditioned. Rap music has been known as an impactful outlet for changing mindsets, enhancing conversation, and minimizing stigma. However, relatively low is the evidence supporting this on mental health awareness of Ugandan men. It is this gap which underpins the study at hand.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a methodology detailing conducting a study is presented. This section presents the research design, study population, sample size and sampling procedures, data collection methods, process of data analysis, issues on validity and reliability (trustworthiness), and ethical issues guiding the study. This qualitative study focuses on rap music and its effect on mental health awareness of men in Mukono District of Uganda.

3.2 Research Design

This study will follow a qualitative research design, a case study. A qualitative design is suitable for the study design as it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations toward rap music and mental health awareness. Case study design is suitable for this research as it gives a detailed and contextualized understanding of a specific population within a defined geographical area, in this case men in Mukono District. According to Creswell (2014), case study research is intended to examine a problem or an issue by exploring it in real life situations.

3.3 Study Population

The participants of the study are to be men of 18–40 years-old living in Mukono District of Uganda. This population is studied due to an age level that is socially engaged, has common exposure to popular culture, especially rap music and is at a level where psychosocial issues such as stress, unemployment, and social pressure become routine.

3.4 Sample Size

The study will consist of about 50 participants. This is consistent with a qualitative focus at the core of qualitative research since, unlike the traditional research, as it considers depth rather than large sample size, it is believed this is big enough to include males aged 18-20, 21-30, and 31 years to 40 years. The sample size also facilitates meaningful thematic saturation, all the while remaining manageable during data collection and analysis.

3.5 Sampling Techniques

Purposive and snowball methodologies will be used in this study.

3.5.1 Purposive Sampling

This study will use purposive sampling to identify and select participants who can provide meaningful insights into the research topic. Specifically, we will recruit men who actively listen to rap music, as they are likely to have experiences and perspectives that can help us better understand the relationship between rap music and mental health awareness. By focusing on individuals who are directly connected to the subject of the study, we can gather richer and more relevant information that addresses the research objectives.

3.5.2 Snowball Sampling

In addition to purposive sampling, the study will use snowball sampling to recruit participants. This approach involves asking participants who have already taken part in the study to refer other individuals who may be willing and suitable to participate. Snowball sampling is particularly useful when researching topics that can be personal or sensitive, such as mental health. Since some individuals may be hesitant to openly discuss their experiences, referrals from trusted friends, peers, or social networks can help researchers connect with participants who might otherwise be difficult to identify or reach. This method therefore helps ensure that a wider range of relevant perspectives is included in the study.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

To ensure rich and in-depth data, the study will use a combination of qualitative data collection methods.

3.6.1 Primary Data

Data will be collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and content analysis. Questionnaires were administered to journalists and communications staff to collect quantitative data on verification speed, ethical challenges, and fake news management effectiveness.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with editors and managers to obtain qualitative insights into verification processes and ethical decision-making. Content analysis was conducted on Youtube and Spotify between 2010 to 2024.

3.6.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

This study will use semi-structured interviews to obtain detailed responses from selected participants regarding rap music and awareness of mental health. The method enables flexibility but ensures that research topics are addressed.

3.6.3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

This study will be applied to 2-3 focus groups (FGDs). Focus groups might help understand perceptions of the groups, perspectives and experiences of individuals. FGDs should enable to examine social relations and group perspectives towards the idea of masculinity, mental health and influence of music.

3.6.4 Content Analysis

There will be content analysis performed on some of the rap songs to analyze thematic lyrics on mental health, emotional expression, stigma, resilience and social commentary. This will contribute to establishing how mental health messages are conveyed through rap music.

3.7 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is conducted to analyze the data obtained from interviews, FGDs and content analysis. This qualitative data was analyzed thematically (which includes identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data), and was coded with the aid of thematic analysis.

The process will include:

1. Transcribing taped interviews and discussions.
2. Getting familiar with the data by reading/re-reading transcripts.
3. Coding data into meaningful categories.
4. Identifying emerging themes on mental health awareness and rap music.
5. Analysis of themes regarding their relevance to research aims and theory and frameworks.

Findings will be reported using accounts presented as a narrative and directly quoting participants.

3.8 Validity and Trustworthiness

To validate and trust the findings of this study, a variety of approaches will be taken.

Credibility

Credibility will be achieved by ensuring prolonged engagement with participants as well as triangulation of data sources including interviews, FGDs and content analysis.

Transferability

Specific context and participants will be described so that readers will be able to infer if the findings in the present study can be generalizable to similar contexts.

Dependability

We will also maintain a clear documentation of the research process, so that the study can be replicated in a similar environment.

Confirmability

Results will be derived by participants' answers, not by researcher bias. Data will be recorded, transcribed, and verified.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

There will be followed ethical guidelines related to the conduct of academic research.

Informed Consent

First of all, prior to the data collection of data, all participants will provide informed consent in the first place. Participants will be informed of the purpose of the study, involvement, and the right to leave the study at any point free from any penalty.

Second, the participants will maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Identifying participants will be maintained anonymously, the names of participants will not be revealed, and pseudonyms will be used when required.

Third, participation in the study will be entirely voluntary, and no one will be compelled to do so or pressured to participate.

Fourth, since this is a sensitive subject, efforts will be made to never do anyone more emotional harm than possible. The study may also restrict the findings to the Mukono District and not be fully transferable to other parts of Uganda. Data collection may also be limited by time and resource constraints.

3.10 Case study

This research focuses on Mukono as case study area. Obviously, the people to study are males from ages 18-40 living in that district. Respondents will be asked questions about the extent to which rap music has touched and transformed their lives, and whether or not this has affected their existing knowledge of issues relating to mental health. The questions will also coincide with the growing prevalence of mental health awareness, and be asking them what's behind the phenomena that seems prevalent in their world.

3.11 Sampling

The findings will be expected through both an interview online and face to face with 50 men.

Age	Listen to rap	Made aware of mental health through rap	Music as a contributor to awareness of mental health
18-20	35	30	10
21-30	30	28	14
30-40	15	12	5

Table 3.1: Sample results from field research conducted on sample group in Mukono

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Results

4.1 Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Findings

This chapter reports, analyses and interprets data from the study on the influence of rap music on mental health awareness among men in Mukono District, Uganda. Findings were also based on content analysis of selected rap music lyrics and responses from 50 male participants (aged 18–40 years).

Data were analyzed thematically in line with the study objectives. Results are then discussed through main themes originating from the research questions: perceptions of mental health, exposure to rap music, the influence of rap music on mental health awareness, and the role of rap music as a stigma reduction tool.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study involved 50 male respondents categorized into three age groups as shown below:

Age Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–20 years	15	30%
21–30 years	20	40%
31–40 years	15	30%
Total	50	100%

Table 4.2: Age Distribution of Respondents

The distribution ensured representation of both younger and slightly older men who are active consumers of music and exposed to mental health-related experiences in different social contexts.

4.3 Men's Perceptions of Mental Health

The findings show that many respondents tend to understand mental health mainly in terms of everyday stress, financial pressure, and emotional struggles, rather than as clinical psychological conditions.

Several participants also noted that mental health is often misunderstood within their communities. One respondent, John Bosco (24), explained:

“In our area, people think mental health problems are related to witchcraft.”

Similarly, James Kalima (32) shared:

“Men are supposed to be strong, so we don't talk about what we are going through.”

Taken together, these responses suggest that awareness of mental health among men is still limited and is strongly shaped by cultural expectations around masculinity, particularly the belief that men should remain strong and emotionally silent.

4.4 Exposure to Rap Music Among Respondents

The findings showed that all respondents had some level of exposure to rap music, whether through local Ugandan artists or international performers. Most participants reported listening to rap music regularly, mainly through smartphones, radio, and social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

Many participants also observed that rap music is especially popular among young men because of its relatable language and storytelling style, which reflects real-life experiences in a way that feels authentic and easy to connect with.

Jacob Kalungi (19) explained this clearly:

“Rap music speaks the truth about real life. That is why many young people listen to it. I love NF, he’s a rapper and I love him because he speaks truth.”

Overall, these responses suggest that rap music is widely consumed within the study population, making it a relevant and influential channel for communication, particularly when discussing issues such as mental health.

4.5 Influence of Rap Music on Mental Health Awareness

The study found that rap music plays a moderate to strong role in shaping awareness of emotional struggles and mental health issues among men.

Many participants shared that rap songs addressing themes such as depression, hardship, and resilience helped them realize that mental health challenges are more common than they had previously thought. These songs often encouraged them to reflect more deeply on their own personal experiences and emotions.

However, not all views were positive. Okot Okot (39) expressed a different perspective:

“Rap music is about promotion of violence and unwholesome thoughts.”

In contrast, a 21-year-old participant noted:

“When I listen to rap songs about pain and struggle, I reflect on my own pain and struggle.”

At the same time, some respondents pointed out that certain rap songs do not promote healthy mental health messages. They observed that some lyrics may instead glorify violence, substance use, or emotional suppression.

Collectively, these findings suggest that the influence of rap music on mental health awareness is not uniform; rather, it largely depends on the content and messages communicated through the lyrics.

4.6 Rap Music and Stigma Reduction

Findings showed that rap music has the potential to reduce stigma around mental health by making emotional expression feel more normal and acceptable. Several respondents explained that when artists openly talk about emotional pain, it becomes easier for listeners to recognize and accept their own struggles. It helps create a sense that they are not alone in what they are feeling.

One participant noted:

“If a famous artist can talk about depression, then it becomes normal for us to talk about it too.”

This reflects the idea that music can play a powerful role in normalizing conversations about mental health and reducing the shame often attached to it. However, some respondents still shared that they hesitate to openly discuss mental health challenges because they fear being seen as weak or judged by others.

4.7 Content Analysis of Rap Lyrics

Content analysis of selected rap songs revealed recurring themes including:

- Emotional struggle and pain
- Poverty and survival stress
- Identity and self-expression
- Mental resilience
- Substance use coping mechanisms

Songs that carried strong mental health messages often focused on themes like perseverance, self-awareness, and being open about one’s emotions. At the same time, some songs included content that may unintentionally encourage unhealthy ways of coping with stress or emotional pain.

This mixed pattern shows that rap music can have both positive and negative influences, depending on the artist and the specific messages being communicated in the lyrics.

4.8 Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the study found that:

- Men in Mukono have limited but growing awareness of mental health.
- Rap music is widely consumed among men aged 18–25.
- Rap music contributes to increased awareness of emotional struggles and mental health.
- The influence of rap music depends on lyrical content and interpretation.
- Rap music has potential as a tool for reducing stigma but is not consistently used for this purpose.

Category	Targeted Respondents	Actual Responses
Questionnaire Respondents	30	25
Interview Respondents	20	18
Total	50	43

Table 4.8 field data 2025

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

This section presents the conclusion and recommendations on the impact of rap music on mental health awareness among men in Mukono District, Uganda. It also highlights the study's contribution to existing literature, while outlining its limitations and suggesting areas for future research.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study investigated the impact of rap music on mental health awareness in men in Mukono District (Mukono District in Mukono Region, Uganda aged 18 – 40 years). The data was retrieved from 50 male participants and thematically analyzed. The findings revealed that:

First, mental health among men is still not well defined in this study population. Most participants were more likely to link mental health to severe psychological disease than regular emotions such as stress and anxiety. Secondly, rap music is widely listened to by men in Mukono and is regarded as a relatable form of expression due to its storytelling aspect and use of everyday language. Third, rap music promotes mental health by putting listeners into situations of emotional struggle, resilience, and personal struggle. As some participants indicated, such messages made them reflect upon their own emotional experiences. Fourth, the study indicates that rap music can help in destigmatizing mental health as it destigmatizes talking about having an emotional issue/being open. Yet it is a greatly lyrical dependent influence, as verses in a few songs could actually drive us towards negative ways of managing and coping.

5.1.1 Objective One: To explore men's views on mental health problems in Mukono District.

The study established that men's mental health problems in Mukono are barely discussed, thus they view mental health illness as a myth and as something that is 'not for men'. The majority of

respondents agreed that rap music does indeed play a huge role in spreading awareness of mental wellbeing amongst men. Respondents indicated that continuous exposure to rap music allows the individual to appreciate the realities in life and embrace treatments such as therapy.

Interview findings further revealed that as much mental wellbeing is a necessity, not many prioritize this, instead they search for other ways to distract themselves from the reality that is their life. Overall, the findings suggest that there is a huge hinderance to positive perceptions of mental health among men in Mukono due to the common cultural norms that define men as ‘too strong to have weak minds.’

5.2.2 Objective Two: To investigate the impact of rap music in men’s awareness of mental health and views on mental health in general.

The findings revealed that rap music has a significant impact on younger men in Mukono. They are able to readily relate to the content, flow and beats. The younger men are also less prone to conform to the cultural norms surrounding men’s mental health. They believe more in therapy, tears and meaningful interactions to help them cope.

The study established that the older generation of men in Mukono are less likely to openly agree to them being mentally strained, instead they would suffer in silence because to them that is deemed as a much more graceful way of handling any mental health challenge.

5.1.3 Objective Three: To explore the capacity of rap music as a strategy to break down the mental health stigma of men's suffering.

The findings indicated that rap music does have the power to break down mental health stigma. If many are freely talking about mental challenges, then the bandwagon effect is birthed, causing some sort of glow within them. Respondents agreed that rap music has and will forever be a tool used to advocate for mental health awareness.

The study also found that men are more prone to talk about their struggles more openly if a fellow man openly talks about their struggles first. Through rap music, men are somehow coerced to normalize mental wellbeing and prioritize their mental health.

5.2 Conclusion of findings

The implication of the findings is that rap music contributes in a multifaceted manner to mental health education among men in Mukono District. The level of mental health awareness around awareness for men is very modest due to social stigma, but rap music has a significant unofficial role as an avenue for people to educate themselves about mental health as well as being able to think about it in a deeper way. But the influence of rap musicality is not so great, it does not come hand in hand with the fact that rap music is equally positive and consistent. It will have an effect if the words get its message across. While songs promoting emotional expression and resilience build awareness, songs that promote violence or substance use may reinforce negative habits. In summary, Rap music is an avenue through which you can channel mental health messages while particularly for young men but needs careful consideration for the effective communication of this positive message.

5.3 Recommendations

To Government and Health Institutions

This could mean that creative communication approaches like music might be embraced in media on mental health advocacy campaigns by the Ministry of Health and mental health stakeholders. Popular culture work may enable young men who are not in time to learn medical messaging via traditional media to connect with health media outlets.

To Musicians and Content Creators

Encouraged-wise, rap should be promoting the use of positive soundtracks to promote mental wellness into their music. Musicians often help diminish stigma and boost listeners' mental health given their power.

To Media Practitioners:

Radio stations, TV shows and network radio and digital media channels should make more room for conversation about mental health issues, how music shapes public opinion and in particular mental health. That can help destigmatize talking about mental health.

For Advocates and NGOs on the Mental Health Front

Mental health agencies should be considering working with musicians and influencers to develop cultural campaigns to raise awareness of the issue and connect with young men.

For men in Mukono District

Men need to be encouraged to talk about mental and emotional challenges and get help if they need it. There is a need to raise more awareness that mental health is part of a person's overall wellbeing.

5.4 Contribution to the Study

The study adds to existing academic literature by exploring the link between pop culture and mental health awareness within the Ugandan context. It highlights rap music as a potential tool for communicating and promoting mental health awareness among men, a topic that has not been widely examined in detail in Uganda.

Beyond expanding understanding in this area, the research offers useful insights for future studies in communication and media studies. It shows how entertainment media can shape the way people think, feel, and respond to social issues, including mental health, and influence broader perceptions and behaviors in society.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted in Mukono District, which means the findings may not fully represent or be generalized to other parts of Uganda. In addition, the study relied on self-reported information from participants, which may be influenced by personal opinions or social desirability bias—especially given the sensitive nature of mental health topics, where respondents may feel pressure to give socially acceptable answers.

Finally, limitations in time and available resources meant that the research could not reach a larger and more diverse group of participants, which may have limited the breadth of perspectives captured in the study.

5.6 Areas for Further Research

We believe future research should be concerned with:

1. Other genres of music (gospel, reggae, drill) and mental health awareness.
2. Studies on music and mental health perception: Data for urban and rural populations.
3. The role of female rap artists in mental health.
4. How exposure to rap music affects attitudes and attitudes towards mental health over time: A longitudinal analysis.

5.7 Final Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of rap music to mental health knowledge of men of Mukono District, Uganda through rap music on their mental health. Results showed that rap music can have a significant, if subtle, impact on awareness regarding mental health awareness. Not an effective substitute for formal mental health education and services, it nevertheless represents a significant complement to reaching male audiences and reducing stigma. Hence, based on the results of the study, there should be purposeful collaboration between health communicators, media people and musicians to use rap music for the awareness to men about mental health.

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