The Ministry of Health (MINISANTE) says one in five Rwandans has experienced a mental health issue at least once, highlighting both the urgency of the issue and the country's ongoing efforts to improve care.

Dr. Yvan Butera, minister of state in the Ministry of Health, presented findings from recent studies showing that depression, anxiety, and trauma remain the most prevalent mental health concerns. He said the government is expanding treatment options and increasing staffing to better meet the growing demand.

"Because of our country's history, including the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, and growing societal pressures, we have to be intentional about addressing mental health," Butera said.

According to the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC), 11.9% of the population experiences depression, 8.1% anxiety, and 3.6% post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Epilepsy affects 2.9%, and 1.9% struggle with alcohol or drug addiction. Severe mental illness was found in 1.3% of the population.

The data also show that mental health conditions are most common among adults ages 45 to 55 (26.9%) and 26 to 35 (21%).

The government has expanded care to include services at health posts, health centers, and specialized facilities like Centre Icyizere and CARAES Ndera. New services also include a ketamine treatment clinic for depression at King Faisal Hospital.

Rwanda has increased the availability of psychiatric medications, with 14 types available at health posts, 20 at health centers, and more than 45 at district hospitals up from just 15 types in 2015.

In 2022-2023, more than 49,000 people sought treatment for mental health concerns, compared to 33,000 in 2019. Most received care at local health centers, though thousands were treated at hospitals or private clinics.

To address a shortage of mental health professionals, Rwanda now trains at least 300 students annually in mental health-related fields, up from 60. These include nurses, general practitioners, and psychologists.

Sen. Umuhire Adrie, chair of the Senate Committee on Social Affairs, said more robust strategies are needed. She cited data from CARAES Ndera showing that, in 2022-2023, 87% of the facility's nearly 96,000 patients had mental health conditions. Youth accounted for 42.4% of these cases, children for 21%, and adults for 36.6%.

Still, challenges remain. Butera pointed to stigma, emotional repression, low staffing levels, and limited public awareness as key obstacles.

"Mental health is not the responsibility of doctors alone," Butera said. "It's a national issue that affects all of us."