



Uganda Prisons Service Kampala, Uganda Workshop Report

November 18-29, 2025





MicroResearch

Resource limited countries bear 25% of the globe's disease burden yet the healthcare professional workforce is less than 1%. Furthermore, these low-income countries obtain only 2% of global research funds. In 2015, the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) were initiated as a program to build and extend the achievements of the United Nation's *Millennium Development Goals* (MDG) initiative. Encouraging national support for research infrastructure and developing local capacity to address complex health problems remains a priority of the SDGs. Similarly to health research and needs, research in Uganda prisons is meager and needs are great. MicroResearch (www.microresearch.ca), an innovative strategy aimed at building the capacity of local health care and in this case correctional professionals is well suited to address problems within the prisons by empowering local correctional service providers to find local solutions for local problems.

The MicroResearch program began in 2008 as a collaboration between faculty at Mbarara University of Science and Technology (Jerome Kabakyenga) and Dalhousie University (Robert Bortolussi and Noni MacDonald). Since then, research capacity building workshops have been held in 11 countries with over 1,800 participants in health and public safety. As of December 2025, over 200 locally driven research projects have been funded and launched with over 60 completed, with results published in reports and/or peer reviewed journals.

MicroResearch Process

The MicroResearch process advances in three phases: (i) Training Workshops are the first phase in the process. (ii) Teams formed during the workshops are then able refine and improve their research ideas for a grant submission to MicroResearch and review by an international panel of research experts from Canada and Africa. Once the research teams have responded to the reviewer recommendations with changes to their proposal, approval is given on scientific merit. (iii) Teams are then able to submit their proposal to their local Research Ethics Committee (REC or IRB) for approval and carry out their research. They are also encouraged to bring their findings back to the community through a Knowledge Translation plan. This report outlines the Research Training Workshop held at the Uganda Prisons Service in Kampala, Uganda from November 18 to November 29, 2025. See Supplement 1 for more information on the Uganda Prisons System.

There were several unique features with this workshop. Due to security needs, there was no internet access on site, only very limited permission for facilitators and need for a different coaching model both during the workshop and after.



Workshop Objectives and Organizers

The class was comprised of 24 participants from the diverse prisons in the Luzira Prisons Complex in Kampala, Uganda. The local site organizer was Dr. Aidah Ajambo with support from Dr. James Kisambu, Assistant Commissioner of Uganda Prisons Service. There were also two facilitators from Canada and one from Mbarara – all experienced in MicroResearch in low-income countries in Africa. Dr. Aidah Ajambo was the local co-teacher who supported several lectures along with the Mbarara facilitator where local expertise was crucial. Of note other potential teachers through a hybrid mode were not possible given the lack of internet due to security requirements.

This workshop involved 3 teams of 8 to 9. Participants were recruited from the local prison services.

The key objectives for the participants of the MR Virtual Workshop:

- to develop skills needed for community focused research within the prison community,
- to develop skills to work in a multidisciplinary group and to become a team, and to write a successful prison community focused research proposal overview

Teachers, Facilitators and Team Mentoring

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Workshop Partners

This workshop and projects emerging as a result are supported by partners including:

- Dalhousie Medical School, Dalhousie University (Volunteer teachers)
- IWK Health
- Memorial University of Newfoundland (Volunteer teachers)
- Uganda Prisons Service
- MicroResearch private donors including Rotary Club of Charlottetown

Workshop Planning and Recruitment

Participants were recruited from the Uganda Prisons Service by invitation and word of mouth. The 24 participants included a range of disciplines, backgrounds and roles in the prison services.

The pre-workshop assessment was completed by 21 of the 24 participants (88%). 12 participants had previous research experience: 8 as study participants and 4 as research assistants. Participants indicated the top things they wanted to get out of the workshop were: to increase their research knowledge and skills, and to identify problems in their community and find solutions to solve them.

“The workshop has come at the right time and I look forward to learning more on research and help to improve on the wellbeing of all other prison staff by providing possible solutions to the identified problems.”

Workshop

The nine-day workshop combined lectures and daily small group interdisciplinary, interactive working sessions. Many of the lectures, support materials and tool kits were recently updated and refreshed in 2025 to include relevance to public safety, AI positioning, and additional updates in many lectures. Lectures began at 8:30am local time. Lectures were followed by group work sessions with mentoring from the facilitators, which will continue with distance context coaches and the facilitators throughout the program duration. The longer-term plan for the Uganda Prisons Service is for this cohort to mature and for several participants to grow into the local coach role. This will provide the Uganda Prisons Service a sustainable MR process for moving forward, addressing concerns around security, confidentiality, and safety. The lectures, exercises, and group work over the eight days led the participants step-by-step through the development of a research proposal overview that was presented on Day 9 participants moved from formulating an idea, to the development of the research question, to the selection of methods to fit the questions. They took into account the budget available and the formulation of the overview of a knowledge translation plan, and determination of what communities to engage, when and how. Daily workshop attendance ranged from 88% to 100%. One participant was



injured – not at the workshop – and hospitalized so was not able to attend in person but was keen to hear each day. He was eager to continue with his team and did work.



Team Research Proposals

As in previous workshops, the major educational component was centered on the proposal overview development in the interdisciplinary groups. There was a significant amount of content on Day 1 to orientate and allow participants to develop their own ideas into a research question based on their own experiences. On Day 2, the collaboration began when participants were divided into three groups. Working in breakout rooms, the groups then discussed each member's question and applied the FINER criteria (discussed during the lecture on Day 2) and selected the “best” one to develop into a research proposal throughout the rest of the workshop. On Day 3, a spokesperson for each group presented the topics to the class and noted the question selected by the group and the rationale for its selection. The questions selected on Day 3 were:

Group 1: *Why do healthcare workers have poor attitude towards Tuberculosis management at Murchison Bay hospital?*

Group 2: *What factors lead to increase in mental illness in our prison services community?*

Group 3: *Why is domestic violence rampant in our community and how can we mitigate it?*

A discussion followed each group's presentation, with emphasis on the importance of narrowing and refining each question.

The series of lectures that followed provided knowledge and skills needed to develop these questions into research proposal overviews. All the lectures included core elements to the MR concept, which



were essential in preparation for the presentation on the final day.

Throughout the workshop, each group became a team, working together on their proposals, guided by their coach.

Final Day of the Workshop

On the final day of the workshop, each team presented the overview of their proposal in a ten-minute presentation to a panel of three local experts. The review panel, along with the two Canadian facilitators, adjudicated each team's presentation and suggested how the proposals might be further strengthened.

The local review panel included:

- **Elubu Francis Xavier**- Assistant Commissioner of Prisons & Regional Commander of Prisons (RPC) - Kampala Extra Region, Uganda Prisons Service
- **Dr. James Kisambu**, PhD- Assistant Commissioner for Health, Headquarters, Uganda Prisons Service
- **Dr. Edward Ahimbisibwe**- Senior Health Inspector, Mbarara Prisons Complex, Uganda Prisons Service

Final Team Questions

Team 1: *Why are healthcare workers reluctant in the management of Tuberculosis (TB) patients in Uganda Prisons Service, Murchison Bay Hospital?*

Team 2: *What are the factors associated with stress among staff in the Uganda Prisons Service: A case study in Kampala Extra Region*

Team 3: *How has substandard and limited housing contributed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among the Junior Ranking Officers (JROs) of Luzira Prisons Barracks?*





Review Panel General Comments

The review panel were very impressed and interested in the work completed by the participants throughout the workshop. Each noted how relevant the three questions were- particularly how all the findings could well influence prison policy and programs. RPC Elubu noted a personal interest in the findings and was very proud of what his prison staff had accomplished so far, admitting he did not believe all would finish the program and learn so deeply and impactfully. He also provided oral permissions to carry out the projects and written would be forthcoming when requested. The teams were all told to include and seek local quarterly or annual data to support and inform their research and provided insight into how to do so and what was collected at UPS, Kampala Extra Region and Headquarters. All three teams were strongly encouraged to carry forward. The panelists were impressed and proud of their staff, also recognizing how hardworking they are and have witnessed the potential and the growth MicroResearch provides individually, socially, organizationally, and in the community.

Workshop Evaluation

An assessment of the workshop by participants as well as how well their team functioned was obtained using structured evaluation forms submitted with 20/24 (83%) of participants completing the form. Lectures that participants indicated were particularly helpful included Qualitative Methods, Knowledge Translation and Preparing a Budget. Overall, respondents indicated that the lectures and workshop content helped to “demystify” research and provided participants with the tools needed to help create positive changes in their communities:

“MicroResearch is transforming the world”

“I am being empowered and engaged in solving problems in the community.”





Recommendations and Comments

Recommendation #1: Specific to Uganda Prison Service

- In settings without Wi-Fi/internet, albeit due to security, infrastructure, etc., the fact that hybrid is not possible must be communicated in advance. This impacts preparation, eliminates outside international expertise participating teaching and harms the teams' abilities to do their background and literature reviews. They cannot do background searches easily, economically, or feasibly. Exploration of how to support literature searches is necessary.
- MicroResearch should explore mobile Wi-Fi supports for such situations in the future, when funding permits, and if such a device would be approved for a UPS workshop.
- For the workshop at UPS, we adopted a new "grow your own coach" UPS sustainable coaching process and model. The current workshop was coached by the two Canadian facilitators. The teams will continue with their support as well as introduce external resource coaches with experience in the topic area and sensitization about prisons. The future involves coaches developed from previous workshops, with support from afar by context expert coaches and the facilitators. This means we have potentially 30 UPS MicroResearch graduates to look to in the future to train to provide future supports.
- The senior leadership, from the very top and down, must be aware of MicroResearch to support the teams, the workshop, and the process. MicroResearch never operates, and has never before run, without the support and knowledge of the Commissioner. In future, they must be made aware and provided opportunity to ask questions and to determine their involvement in the workshop.
- For future planning of a MicroResearch workshop, particularly when funded externally, we must create processes for organization that are transparent and responsive to planning needs. This will have all more comfortable and encourage success.
- We must continue to seek external fundings for MicroResearch Grants at UPS. The needs of UPS are vast and preclude at this time for orienting funds to grants, thus, this is an exception made with extensive deliberation using a culturally informed process.
- MicroResearch should consider having a workshop with two prison staff teams and two inmate teams (i.e., prisoners using UPS terminology) to maximize opportunity to support growth at UPS from the inside out in a sustainable manner. Having teams of inmates will also ensure due to the UPS structure, the information learned is transferred to other prisoners.
- The date for grant submission is set for March 1, 2026, however, to keep the momentum going, we encourage all to support teams in submission as soon as they are ready. Submission is directly to MicroResearch (microresearch@dal.ca)
- Create a site checklist to better ensure have all materials needed (i.e., microphones, snacks, name tags, large paper for mind maps with marking pens (if possible, projectors, etc.) and a space are available for us.
- Create a UPS MicroResearch Supervisor who tracks teams in collaboration with MicroResearch Canada and supports future workshops as well as knowledge translation processes and other MicroResearch related activities to ensure sustainability and success. We recommend MicroResearch graduate Edward Ahimbisibwe.
- Facilitators, co-teachers, future coaches, etc. must be sensitized about prisons and willing to be sensitized regarding UPS. They must be without bias and understand and respect the society that is prisons, including each UPS campus and the Service a whole. Further, they must be prepared to take on additional responsibilities beyond facilitation and be committed to site success.
- Ethical review clearance processes must be clearly established and a protocol drafted for use in all UPS workshops.
- Support Dr. Edward Ahimbisibwe as he is drafting a chapter for the MicroResearch book under contract with Springer, as he continues to not have a laptop for use.



Recommendation #2- Content Changes

- Ensure all pptx are most recent and updated
- 1B: Add using phone for literature searches, need to simplify as much as possible as screens on phone are very small and often people are unable to download. Further we must fix the pentagram on the slide to add in public safety component
- 4B: Add slides on how to do references and how to reference
- 5A & 7B: Include that not all public services allow social or new media interaction, thus provide caution to ensure adherence to organization policy
- 6A: Update and more user friendly the slide template for final presentation and provide to all participants on the USB
- Add a toolkit on making PowerPoint presentations, with specific information about how to make the actual slides
- 7A: Add to ethics the importance and realities around data privacy in public safety and a slide outlining the UPS ethics review process for all UPS workshops (in development).
- 8A: Require more information on SBAR, on what it is and how SBAR is different (but also what is shared) with policy briefs
- 10B: Need an alternative to career planning when working with people in careers for the time when panelists are deliberating. Perhaps consider discussion on avenues to promotion, continued education if interested, and volunteering and getting involved with MicroResearch Public Safety

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our thanks to UPS for providing an opportunity to introduce MicroResearch at the Kampala Extra Region to an incredible group of 24 well-chosen (i.e., interdisciplinary, differing in rank, occupation, role) participants. We are grateful to Jimmy, his support and care in transporting safety, at times through remarkable traffic “jams”, and always with kindness, entertainment, and heartfelt conversations. We extend our heartfelt thanks to Jimmy. We are grateful to Prof. Kazooba for facilitating the UPS workshop with us, appreciating his insights and grateful for the knowledge he shared. We also appreciate the efforts of Dr. Aidah Ajambo, who co-taught a module, ensured there were meals ordered to feed our hardworking participants, and had printed the certificates for which our teams earned. Thank you to the panelists, our remarkable and insightful (but very busy) panelists for their valuable feedback and constructive critiques on the final day of the workshop and for showing our participants that they can do it and are believed in. Their ongoing support is essential for the sustainability of MicroResearch, and we are confident it will be maintained. Finally, we thank the participants for their engagement throughout the nine days- we are grateful for all they shared and the efforts. The projects are incredibly insightful and will transform UPS. Their work ethic is impressive, their kindness exceptional, and their lack of judgement and acceptance of diversity should be modeled for the world. Thank you.



Respectfully submitted,

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Supplement 1: Uganda Prisons Site- Kampala

Our site for the current workshop was in a Kampala cluster of prisons all part of the Uganda Prisons Service (UPS). For a brief context, the UPS was founded in 1893 (Prisons standing orders, 2017) when placed under the British protectorate and represents an arm of the King's African Rifles (K.A.R). K.A.R. were Uganda's armed soldiers at the time, charged with providing custodial oversight to those convicted of transgressing the law and were to, as a result, be confined. Later, in 1958, the Prisons Ordinance was positioned to ensure the UPS was independent, for the first time. In 1964, the Prisons Act of 1964 replaced the Ordinance, making prisons entirely distinct by separating the prison service from the armed forces and police service. Today, prisons are the responsibility of UPS and fall under Article 215 of the Constitution of Republic of Uganda (2005; as amended). The mission of UPS is to ensure the humane, safe, and secure custody of those in prison while striving always to place human rights at the core of all correctional programming. Currently, there are 269 prisons clustered in 19 regions of Uganda. In January 2025, UPS had 14,021 staff under their employ and housed 78,700 people. The largest proportions of those incarcerated are people convicted (51.8%), remanded (47.4%), and debtors (0.8%; i.e., they owe money to a creditor). Although UPS strives to rehabilitate and prepare those incarcerated for reentry, the service faces, and must manage, arduous challenges, many unimaginable in developing countries, such as famine, space limitations, and infectious disease.

