

**EXTENDING THINKING ABOUT ELDER ABUSE. POLITICAL ABUSE
AMONG THE OLDER PEOPLE IN ZAMBIA**

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This article is aimed at raising awareness about the existence of political abuse among the old people in Zambia. It is also aimed at extending literature on elder abuse. The article which is based on empirical evidence from Kalulu Rural District of Zambia argues that elder abuse does not only take place through physical, financial/material, emotional/psychological, and sexual abuses of the older people or through neglect as widely reported in the available literature on elder abuse, but also takes place politically. The article further argues that since ageing is a normal process of human life which every human being expects to go through, and given the fact that the world is moving towards population ageing, evidence of political abuse among some old people in Kalulu should be taken seriously and immediate concerted efforts should be put in place to stop it. This is because it has serious negative implications on the national development of Zambia and the tenets of democracy that the people of Zambia and the whole world are trying to promote. The causes of political abuse in Kalulu, policy implications on how to address political abuse in Kalulu as well as implications for future research are also provided.

Key words: *older people; elder abuse; political abuse; Zambia*

Introduction

Elder abuse is a global problem. This is because it is being experienced in every corner of this world (United Nations, 2002; World Report on Violence and Health, 2002). World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe (2011, p. viii) and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) (2013) have reported that globally, the number of cases of elder maltreatment is projected to increase as many countries have rapidly ageing populations. According to WHO (2008), elder abuse is underreported by as much as 80%. Despite the fact

that elder abuse is underreported, evidence shows that at least 4 million older people are thought to experience maltreatment in any one year in the European Region alone (WHO Regional Office for Europe 2011, p. viii; UNECE, 2013, p. 3). However, several gaps exist in the available literature especially on the types of abuse that older people suffer. For example in the international literature a typology that has similarly gained ground in the study of abuse of older persons identifies five categories of abuse. These are physical abuse; emotional/psychological abuse; financial/material abuse; sexual abuse; and neglect (World Report on Violence and Health, 2002; United Nations, 2002; UNECE, 2013).

The above categorizations leave out other types of abuse that older people suffer and as such it narrows the phenomenon of elder abuse. For example my study on elder abuse in Zambia has revealed that elder abuse in Zambia does not only exist in the above forms. It exists in many forms which include spiritual abuse and political abuse. However, these two types of abuse are rarely talked about in the available literature. Thus, in this article I talk about political abuse among the older people in Zambia. This is aimed at raising awareness about the existence of political abuse among the older people by using empirical evidence from Zambia. I hope this will extend the literature and spark debates on elder abuse among the readers of this article. However, for the sake of simplicity this article is structured as follows: first I will define elder abuse according to the available literature. Second, I will provide the background information on elder abuse in Zambia and its motivation in writing this article. I will then define elder abuse from the perspectives of the research participants who participated in this study. Third, I will show the methodology used in this study. This will be followed by the findings of this study. A discussion and conclusion of the findings of the study will thereafter follow. Finally policy implications and implications for future research will be provided.

Definitions of elder abuse

To start the ball rolling, let me say that there is no universally agreed upon definition of elder abuse. This is because elder abuse is a very broad and complex phenomenon. In part this is because it is a socially constructed phenomenon and social constructs are never the same (World Report on Violence and Health, 2002). According to Wolf (2000) elder abuse is a term with

broad meaning, including many forms and examples, always describing harm or loss to an older person. Payne (2005, p. 2) argues that ‘the term elder abuse captures virtually any possible harm inflicted on an older person by society, care setting, or individual.’ World Health Organization (WHO) has also defined the concept of elder abuse. This buzz organization defines elder abuse as a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or stress to an older person (WHO 2012, p.1). Elder abuse takes place in different forms. As already indicated, in the international literature a typology that has gained ground in the study of abuse of older persons identifies five categories of abuse. These are physical abuse; emotional/psychological abuse; financial/material abuse; sexual abuse; and neglect (World Report on Violence and Health, 2002; United Nations, 2002; UNECE, 2013).

When I critically look at the above definitions, I can see that the common denominator of all these definitions is that elder abuse is an act that hurts or painfully disturbs the life of an elder person. Although the meaning of the word ‘elder person’ is not provided in the above definitions, in this article, the term elder person is used to refer to any person who is aged 50 years and above and/or one who has grey hair. This is because the main part of this article is written on the basis of the empirical evidence on elder abuse in Kalulu Rural District of Zambia. The informants revealed to me that the phenomenon of elder abuse in Kalulu Rural District was experienced by those aged 50 years of age and above and especially those with grey hair. This revelation made me to think that the term ‘old person’ was a social construct. This is because in many European countries someone at 50 years is not considered an elder person (WHO, 2013), but in Zambia someone at 50 is considered an old person. It also made me to think that taking the local context was important when looking at the phenomenon of elder abuse as what may be considered relevant in one setting or part of the world may not be relevant in other parts of the world. By abuse, the research participants defined it as the deliberate or intentional acts to harm the old people. In line with this definition of abuse, political abuse was defined by the research participants as deliberate or intentional acts to harm the old people politically. Examples of political abuse from the research participants’ experiences included forcing or tricking or refusing old people to vote for a certain political candidate or party in an election.

Political abuse – Empirical evidence from Zambia

Before I show evidence of the existence of political abuse in Zambia, let me provide some background information on elder abuse in Zambia. This will include description of the district where my study was done.

Background information on elder abuse in Zambia and its motivation in this article

In 2014 I conducted the first ever [qualitative] study on elder abuse in Zambia with focus on one rural district [Kalulu District] and one urban district (Nkovu District) where incidences of elder abuse had been recorded. I did the study for the period of seven months. That was motivated by the fact that despite elder abuse being one of the major social problems in Zambia, there has never been a study in Zambia that had focused entirely on elder abuse (Senior Citizens Associations of Zambia, 2012). Thus, the study was meant to bring about a better understanding of the phenomenon of elder abuse in Zambia. That was also meant to inform the Zambian government and other stakeholders on what should be done to address the problem of elder abuse in rural and urban Zambia. **NOTE:** the actual names of the districts where the study was done have been changed. This is meant to protect the identity of the study participants. However, the actual verbatim have been maintained.

On the findings of the study and specifically on the types of elder abuse recorded in Kalulu Rural District, the following types came out: all the 20 participants who participated in the study revealed that spiritual abuse where the old people were accused of practicing witchcraft was the main type of elder abuse. This was followed by neglect which was mentioned by 10 participants. Verbal and physical abuses came out third as they were mentioned by 8 participants. However, even if neglect, verbal and physical abuses stood as separate types of elder abuse, the study participants reported that these three types of elder abuse were part of spiritual abuse. Political abuse was fourth as it was mentioned by 7 participants. Financial/material abuse was the last and mentioned only by 2 participants.

Of the above types, political abuse baffled me a lot. That was due to three reasons. First, it is rarely talked about in the international literature on elder abuse. Second, its overall negative impacts on the Zambian society seem to be huge. This is because Zambia has an electoral system of simple majority which means that a political candidate/party can win an election [presidential, parliamentary and local government] even by a single vote (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2014). Sadly enough I learnt from some study participants that some old people were politically abused by some politicians to win elections and that resulted into sending wrong people into public positions of authority which ultimately impacted negatively on the governance of the whole nation. Third, from the participants' perspectives, the other types of abuse – spiritual, physical, verbal, neglect and financial/material were mainly due to political abuse of the old people. That was because the wrong politicians who won elections after manipulating some old people did not put in place right public measures to address the problems that affected the old people. It is in light of these reasons that I have written this article with the aim to raise awareness about political abuse among the old people in Kalulu Rural District and thus extend global literature on elder abuse.

Description of the study site – Kalulu District

My study site was Kalulu District. Kalulu is one of the rural districts of Zambia. It is about 950 kilometres by road from Zambia's capital city Lusaka. As of 2010 National Population Census, Kalulu District had 13, 500 people (Zambia National Census Report, 2010). The main community leaders in this district include senior chief Kalulu, village headmen, ward councillors, religious leaders, area development committee members, youth and women groups and community neighbourhood security watch officers. Other renowned community leaders include headteachers, medical officers, police officers, social workers and other heads of government institutions (Ministry of Community and Social Services Report – Kalulu District, 2014).

In terms of socio-economic development, the district is underdeveloped. For example, with the exception of a few government workers who are in formal employment, all the community members are in informal employment and mainly subsistence farming and petty trading (Zambia National Census Report, 2010). In terms of national social protection, it is mainly the

government workers who have guaranteed social security. The majority of the local people including the old people do not have any access to national social protection except free primary health care. Because of this, almost all the local people rely on informal social security/protection mechanisms such as that provided by the extended family members, friends and the church (Kabelenga, 2012). Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are also absent in this community. Long distances to social services, unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, disease and morbidity are among other common characteristics of this district (Zambia National Census Report, 2010). Besides these social problems, it is also one of the rural districts in Zambia which has witnessed incidences of elder abuse. Ministry of Community and Social Services Report (2014) notes that incidences of elder abuse in Kalulu District are common. However, the actual number of incidences of elder abuse recorded so far is not well known because of lack of available statistics on the prevalence of elder abuse in Kalulu. Thus, I decided to undertake my study in this district because of the revelation that elder abuse was common in the district.

Research Methodology

This study utilized qualitative research methodology to allow for the voices of the community leaders and organizations dealing with ageing issues in Kalulu District to be heard. Because little is known about political abuse among old people in Zambia and in international literature on elder abuse, this grounded approach was preferable (Pope, Loeffler, and Ferrell, 2014). One of the distinguishing features of qualitative inquiry is that it allows for the generation of new insights about the particular issue under investigation. This comes about because the researcher studies the respective phenomenon in depth with the local people who have encountered that phenomenon. Thus, the researcher does not go to the people who have encountered the phenomenon with the already predetermined answers to the phenomenon. Rather, the researcher goes to the people who have encountered the phenomenon open-minded because he/she wants to learn from the people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). This thinking can also be thought about with reference to the popular adage which states that ‘experience is the best teacher’(Osei-Hwedie, Mwansa, and Mufune, 1990, p.95). Thus, the participants in qualitative research are seen as the researcher’s teachers or sources of knowledge (Creswell,

2003). In this study, my teachers were community leaders and organisations in Kalulu Rural District dealing with ageing issues.

Confidentiality

Because the study participants were assured that their names would not be revealed any where, I have replaced the real name of the district where the study took place with an aliases/assumed name and that is Kalulu District. The real names of the informants are also changed. However, I have maintained the actual verbatim as they came out during the interviews.

Type of data collected

The data that I collected was qualitative in nature. This is because I wanted to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of political abuse from the experiences of the people who had encountered it, and that was only possible with qualitative data.

Data collection

Data collection was done following approval of my research plan at the University of Lapland in Finland where I am pursuing my doctorate degree in social sciences. Because this was a follow-up study to my earlier study on elder abuse in Kalulu Rural District, data collection took place for the period of one month – September, 2014. An unstructured questionnaire was used during data collection. This was meant to allow the informants to expose the phenomenon of political abuse in its totality. Digital recorders were used to record the interviews. As back-up for the interviews, three digital recorders were used simultaneously whenever I conducted any interview. A notebook was also used to take down the notes during the interviews. Before any interview was conducted, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and those who were willing to participate in the study signed the informed consents – two copies each. One copy remained with the informant, and I remained with another copy. Thus, no participant was forced to participate in the study.

Number of interviews conducted

I conducted 7 in-depth interviews. Of these, 5 were one to one in-depth interviews and 2 were focus group discussions. On average each interview lasted between one hour and two hours. I conducted all the interviews myself because I wanted to make sure that I collected all the information that I wanted to know about political abuse in Kalulu District from each study participant.

Selection and characteristics of the study participants

A total of 7 participants were purposively selected to participate in the study. All the participants had the first hand encounters with political abuse in Kalulu District. I identified these participants because I earlier did generic research on the types of elder abuse that were experienced in Kalulu District, and some research participants reported political abuse as one of the types of elder abuse that was experienced in the district. These were the participants whom I selected to participate in the study. Interestingly also was that some of the participants had also actively participated in elections like presiding officers. Thus, because political abuse was a new form of elder abuse that I never came across in all the literature that I read on elder abuse, I decided to make a follow-up study with all the informants that mentioned political abuse in the first study on elder abuse that I undertook in Kalulu district. Thus, by allowing only participants with political abuse encounters, it enabled me to collect first hand information on political abuse in Kalulu District. In terms of age, the participants were aged between 27 years of age and 67 years of age. Of these, 2 were women and the rest [5] were males. This gender imbalance should not be a surprise. In Zambia, like many other African countries, there are more male leaders than female leaders. Furthermore, all the participants had college/tertiary and university education. Thus, all the interviews were conducted in English.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed manually after transcribing all the 7 interviews. I first read each of the 7 transcripts several times to get a sense of the data in its entirety. During initial reading of the transcripts, open coding procedures were employed, where codes were created from what was present in the data (Pope et al., 2014). After identifying initial codes in the transcripts, I moved to focused coding. This involved making decisions about what codes were most relevant to the

research objective, discarding codes that were not relevant, and combining earlier codes that were similar. Constant comparison was used to look for similarities and differences in categories across the transcripts. Thus, the whole process was a back and forth process and this enhanced better understanding of the political abuse among some old people in Kalulu (Creswell, 2003; Pope, et al., 2014).

Findings

Evidence of political abuse in Kalulu

In an attempt to adequately focus my study, the first question which I asked all the participants was: How serious is the problem of political abuse in Kalulu District? In response, all the participants revealed that political abuse was a serious problem in Kalulu. It was serious during the time of presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. Please see the narratives below:

“Political abuse happens there. There are sometime situations where by you are keeping this old person at home and then because they are unable to keep those documents [voters cards and national registration cards] and they will give you to say can you keep these things for me, then when the time to vote comes, you tell them you should vote for this one. If not you will be chased from here. Sometimes somebody even say no I will not give you the documents so that they don’t go and vote.” (Male informant aged 34)

“It is true when you look at the political interference on our old men and women you find that at provincial level at urban setup there a very few aged people and if at all there are any, they are very well informed with what is happening in terms of governance. I’m saying so because they are exposed to TV, radio and so many other facilities but those in the villages that one [political abuse] is very common because you find that these politicians, you only see them going to rural setups when it is time to vote but in town they don’t normally go there because they know the people are up to date. But in the rural setup it is very common and in most cases it is the youth’s that go to these old people tell them something that’s wrong for example maybe if

they have a candidate of their choice so they go to them and feed them that wrong information just because this candidate has bought them beer and they can go and interact with these old people because they are conversant with the language that is spoken there. And normally you will find that in the rural setup these aged, most of them, they don't know how to write and if these people are busy campaigning or maybe it's time for voting, they are just told to say the head that you see on top or the one that is the last is the one you should vote for. So if they go there for sure and this person maybe just knows how to mark automatically he or she will go for the one who is on top according to the way he or she is told. I remember an incident somewhere where this candidate is fond of putting on a jacket so they even nicknamed him, jacket man. So an old woman comes and says, who is your preferred candidate, this woman just says the jacket man but when you look at the ballot paper, so many candidates there have jackets so that woman since she has mentioned of the jacket, even when I point at my preferred candidate as a youth who is very interested in that candidate, she will go for it. So you find that in the rural setup it is very common.' (Focus Group Discussion 2).

“They can go and give them Chitenge (piece of cloth) and ask them to vote for them, even when going to vote they use the grandchildren to direct the grandfathers on who they should vote for, it is even worse when the grandfather doesn't know how to write because he will be escorted just as a procedure to say - put your finger here for example on the MMD name, the grandchild may just make him hold the palm there and tick and we have seen this [laughs] and that is the worst abuse you can see which I saw when I was presiding officer someone holding the pen for the older man and going direct on the...[laughs] and asks him to tick there. At some point I tend to think that senior citizens should be exempted from voting’ (Focus Group Discussion 1).

Note – MMD is one of the political parties in Zambia and stands for Movement for Multiparty Democracy.

From the above participants' narratives it is clear that some of the old people in Kalulu District are suffering political abuse. Thus, if there is anyone who thought that political abuse among the older people was not in existence, this finding marks the beginning of changing those thoughts about elder abuse.

Causes of political abuse in Kalulu

Five themes were identified on the causes of political abuse as viewed from the experiences of the study participants. These were old age, illiteracy, income/material poverty, perceived benefits of political abuse, multipartyism and flaws in the Zambian electoral system. These themes are discussed below.

Old age

The participants reported that old age for some old people was one of the main causes of their political abuse. It was viewed that as a person grew older, they reached a certain point where their mental faculties became weak and for some their eye sights became frail. These changes created fertile ground for their political abuse as they were not for example able to distinguish between different political parties and also to notice that ballot papers for example had been turned upside down when voting. Some of the participants said as below:

“The key thing is the mental faculties of an elderly person seem to be failing them in terms of supporting or defending themselves. They will argue to some point and give up. It is the brain that has worked enough and so, that is how they are abused in terms of the brain exhaustion or tiredness or whatever you can call it. They can't differentiate. It's like all the parties; PF, UPND they speak the same. When they say, they are all politicians, they are not able to get to say these are PF policies, this is UPND policies and the difference is this.” (Male Informant, aged 49 years). Note – PF (Patriotic Front) and UPND (United Party for National Development) are examples of political parties in Zambia.

“We have seen situations where a ballot paper is turned upside down and given to this person who cannot see properly. So by seeing that top portrait there that person will say this is the preferred candidate and will mark not knowing to say he or she is voting for someone who is at the last. So for most of those people the cause is poor eye-sight due to their old age.” (Focus Group Discussion 2).

Illiteracy among some older people

The participants viewed that illiteracy among some old people was another cause of their political abuse. Because some of them are not able to read and write, during elections they were deliberately made to vote for the candidates who were not of their own choice. Twambo who was once a presiding officer in an election and Kina who also participated in an election narrated what they saw during elections on how illiteracy among some old people was causing their political abuse:

“It is even worse when the grandfather doesn’t know how to write because he will be escorted just as a procedure to say - put your finger here for example on the MMD name, the grandchild may just make him hold the palm there and tick and we have seen this [laughs] and that is the worst abuse you can see which I saw when I was presiding officer. Someone holding the pen for the old man and going direct on the...[laughs] and asks him to tick there. At some point I tend to think that senior citizens should be exempted from voting’’. (Twambo during Focus Group Discussion 1).

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at my preferred candidate as a youth who is very interested in that candidate, she will go for it. So you find that in the rural setup it is very common.'' (Kina during Focus Group Discussion 2).

Income/material poverty

The participants also saw income/material poverty as another factor that was causing some old people to be abused politically. From the participants' experiences income/material poverty was applicable to both the old people and the abusers. That is, because many old people and the abusers especially the youths were living in income/material poverty, they were easily manipulated by politicians by giving them trivial things like beer, clothes and small amounts of money in turn for the vote. The participants in the two focus group discussions recalled what happens during election period in Kalulu District:

“These young people are the ones who are able to discuss, hold conversations with these political party leaders and they are the ones who are persuaded by the political parties leaders to support them and hence they are the ones the political parties leaders use to go and entice their grandparents to vote for them so that things would be better for them while in actual sense things do not actually become better for them and if anything the ones who benefit are the young people because of the incentives that they get from these politicians probably in terms of money and materials.” (Focus Group Discussion 1).

“In fact it is not possible for a candidate to go everywhere and so they will capture these same illiterates, give them bicycles, shoes, Chitenges, give them a bit of money, buy them beers like Chibuku to encourage them, motivate them to go out and capture votes for them and so these are the ones who actually do that. They get those who have very little. I don't know about the urban setting but with the rural areas that is what happens.” (Male informant aged 49).

“Those [old people] who abuse substances they go to beg for this Chibuku beer, there someone will be buying and will be preaching this message of that party to

them and because they want to continue accessing that substance [beer] and so they will be caught up.” (Focus Group Discussion 1).

Perceived benefits of political abuse

The participants revealed also that the perceived benefits of winning an election on the side of the abusers were causing political abuse of some old people. The perceived benefits included the monetary gains and the social status that accrue from being in political power. Shockingly, the participants revealed that these perceived benefits made even family members to politically abuse their own old people. Some of the participants in both one-to one in-depth interviews and focus group discussion amplified the linkages between perceived benefits and political abuse of some old people by the abusers as below:

“Even those who don’t abuse substance because they have interest to gain, if he wants to be a councilor and a councilor will be getting K700 (around 91.62 US Dollars) as an allowance, he will make sure that they [old people] will vote for that party.” (Male informant aged 49).

“If I am a councilor and I am gaining an income from this party and then this income is the one I use to take care of this household and then this old woman is now coming publically to oppose me, if I lose and that party loses the income will cease and even you [old person], you will suffer and so there is that interest that I am pursuing which will cause me to abuse to say; can you just agree with me I know better because what will come you will benefit. If you fall sick I will go to the chairman to borrow a vehicle for PF and they will take you to the hospital and so there is always a special interest that leads to this situation [political abuse].” (Focus Group Discussion 2).

“The other one is because of the vested interest, because for me to support this party there is an interest I am persuading and some it is just the social status - these belong to the ruling party and so he wants a lot of them to belong to the ruling party even when they are passive they are saying we are the ones who are ruling [laughs]

are you in the ruling hierarchy. And so that interest will cause them to abuse or to pursue many more.’’ (Focus Group Discussion 1).

Multiparty democracy

The participants also saw the emergence of so many political parties in Zambia in the name of democracy as another factor that was causing political abuse of some old people. Their perspective was that multiparty democracy had brought about stiff competition on how to win an election as political parties always competed for votes from the electorates. As result, some politicians had resorted to using socially unaccepted ways of winning elections which included manipulating vulnerable people in society like the old people. Mwange and Kina provided typical examples of how multiparty democracy fueled political abuse of some old people:

“Because of many political parties you find that maybe this one they have got their own candidate to support and then people are divided. It’s a common practice that large families have got different political parties.’’ (Kina during Focus Group Discussion 2).

“Yes, it is multipartyism because if she is my grandmother and she is stubbornly supporting a different party while the guardian also is supporting a different party and when the guardian’s party brings something they will say that you don’t support us but now you want to benefit from this and so it can either be anyone because that one has no regard and he will just say that you belong to another party and then for me it will be to show that she was wrong actually and so it is both, you want to prove a point to this person[old person] that what she was thinking was actually wrong.’’ (Mwange during Focused Group Discussion 1).

Flaws in the Zambian electoral system

Weaknesses in the Zambian electoral system were also seen by the participants to be another cause of political abuse among some old people. Examples of the weaknesses included allowing only the presiding officer or any family member to assist some old people with special needs when voting. The participants viewed presiding officers and/or family members as human beings who always had their own preferred candidates during elections and when helping some old

people, some presiding officers or family members guided some old people to vote for the presiding officer's or that respective family member's preferred candidate and not the old person's preferred candidate. Another flaw in the Zambian electoral system was the way the political candidates were arranged on ballot boxes. Some participants revealed that the way the candidates were arranged always favored the ruling party as many old people always voted for the first or last candidate on the ballot box and that was mainly the ruling party. Some participants provided the following typical examples on the basis of what they saw for themselves during elections:

“According to the guideline of the Electoral Commission of Zambia, no political agent is allowed to help any old aged person to vote. It is only the presiding officer who is allowed to even go with this old person into the booth and maybe, not maybe and ask this person to say who is your preferred candidate? We have maybe three or we have eleven [political candidates]. Then that person will say, my preferred candidate is this person, all the same they are deprived because you find that some of us [presiding officers] you can have a candidate of our choice even when I'm told to say no my candidate is this, here I will still go for mine because I want him/her to go through, or I don't want him/her to go through, that is my observation.” (Juma during Focus Group Discussion 2).

“And what I learnt is that even the way the electoral procedure arranges the candidates they always start with the ruling party. Even the last election PF was on the bottom of the page and when explaining you start with the first one and you explain them all in order of the way they are popular, that's how they are arranged. You go with him or her [old person] in the booth and ask which candidate you are going to vote for? You explain and for them [old people] the first name you will mention that is the one they will give you [laughs].” (Focus Group Discussion 1).

“Many old people always vote for the first picture.” (Female informant aged 27 during Focus Group Discussion 1).

“Old people always vote for the first name and when you explain for example to say this is MMD and they say that same one and that cuts your continuation and for the rest she will just be agreeing through and you wonder to say it is yes everywhere but where exactly? It’s a dilemma, you see and if you have actually very much gone into these things you will see the flaws which can cause abuse.” (Male informant aged 49 during Focus Group Discussion 1).

The above were the major issues that were seen by the participants to be behind political abuse of some old people in Kalulu. As the say goes, to every cause there is a possible solution (Osei-Hwedie et al, 1990), thus the next part of this article presents the possible ways of addressing political abuse in Kalulu from the perspectives of the study participants.

How to address political abuse in Kalulu

As a way to conclude my interviews, I sought the views of the study participants of what they thought should be done to address the problem of political abuse among the old people in Kalulu District and Zambia in general. Two suggestions came out and these were exemption of some old people from voting and the use of religion. Unfortunately the use of the police was not seen to be effective in addressing political abuse. That was because the police were always far away from the communities where old people live. Below I discuss each of these suggestions.

Exemption from voting

All the participants suggested exempting some old people from voting as the main solution to addressing the problem of political abuse among the old people in Kalulu and Zambia in general. That was because some old people were being politically abused due to their conditions. They felt that if some old people were stopped from voting, automatically their political abuse would be stopped as politicians will have nothing to do with those old people.

“If we are to fight this type of abuse, we need to exempt certain old people from voting. Like those with mental disorders, who are too old who cannot even think, those older people are not supposed to be allowed to vote. Because even if you go

and sensitize those people they do not have the mental capacity really to follow what you are telling them to say that maybe there is some corruption taking place or maybe some electoral malpractice.” (Focus Group Discussion 2).

“Someone has reached a point where you can see that they are really older, they cannot think like what he was saying to say; someone had to get the hand to vote for what they want and not the wish of the person who is actually voting. I think like that yes, those ones who can’t do it themselves let them be exempted from voting because they have reached the capacity where they can’t think properly. Instead of voting they spoil the ballot, instead of making X, the mark even goes out because they are shaking.” (Focus Group Discussion.1).

“Totally, there is time for retirement from everything. You reach a certain point where you stop. and you leave it to other people, even in churches you find that this was a church elder and the like and he will reach a point to say that I am tired and I can no longer lead this ministry and so for now let us give it to the younger ones.” (Female informant aged 27).

“That is for those of us whose minds have retired, ah..... maybe we can be exempted. We had our own time actually, there is no victimization this person had his own time to participate, and they had their own time, right? They voted when they were youthful and it’s just high time that they can also hand over that authority to other generations to carry the mantle and I don’t see whether that is abuse or what, no.” (Male Informant aged 49).

“Yes because their right is stolen, it is being abused by someone else. So it is better for those people with mental disorders to just stay away from voting.” (Female Informant aged 67).

The use of religion

The participants also felt that the use of religion could also help in reducing political abuse among the old people. That is, religion teaches good morals and does not support taking advantage of the vulnerable in society. Thus, religion should preach against political abuse of the old people and help abusers to know God.

“Religion should come in because mostly those who abuse old people are those I can say who are half religious. I will call them those who are lukewarm, very lukewarm because those who are very religious they consider politics as evil, dirty and their participation is very thin but those who are not very religious you find them in bars and markets and everywhere noise and the like and those are the ones but those who are kind of religious..... no, they see it as worldly, sinful and so mostly uninvolved.” (Focus Group Discussion 1).

“Even here so we can see that if we are to fight this type of abuse religion should play a part because if a number of these young people are so religious, they understand God, biblical principles that don’t manipulate someone to do something which they don’t know, they will cease to be doing that.” (Focus Group Discussion 2).

Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the phenomenon of political abuse among the old people in Kalulu Rural District of Zambia using the perspectives of community leaders and organizations dealing with ageing issues in Kalulu. The study was also meant to extend literature on elder abuse. From the findings of this study it is clear that some old people in Kalulu District are politically abused. The causes of this abuse are old age, illiteracy among some old people, income/material poverty, perceived benefits of political abuse, multipartyism, and flaws in the Zambian electoral system. From the participants’ perspectives, the solutions to political abuse in Kalulu lie in the exemption of [some] old people from voting and using religion in preaching against political abuse of the old people.

Most of the above findings agree with other literature on the right to vote among the old people not just in Zambia but globally. For example, Mubiana (2015) has published an article on Zambia entitled 'Illiterate people should not vote'. In this article Mubiana has reported that in Zambia most of the voters are literally instructed on how to vote. He reports that some voters are told that if they vote a particular way, they will be provided with alcohol and cigarettes. Some are given as little as K20.00 (around 2.60 US Dollar) for them to vote a certain way. By analyzing the challenges of democracies globally, Butler and Ranney (1994), Lijphart (1997) and Lever (2009) have noted that insincere voting is possible in democracy. They have argued that strategic or insincere voting is not uncommon when a group knows the redistribution of potential votes in advance. They have noted that many political actors ask for preference schedule of everything. This is to arrive at the final group rank ordering of all the contestants that best express the desires of the electorates. Because of this voters can be made to vote insincerely by changing the order of the preference schedule. The above all arguments are exactly what my study has established in Kalulu Rural District. Some old people in Kalulu are politically abused by politicians either by giving them very trivial material things due to income/material poverty, or due to illiteracy or by manipulating the ballot papers. In part this is because of the challenges of winning an election in a multiparty democracy which Butler and Ranney (1994) and Lijphart (1997) have talked about. In rural Zambia even if many old people participate in voting, many of them are illiterate and live in abject poverty. The Zambia National Census Report (2010) and the Zambia National Ageing Policy (2013) have reported that in rural parts of Zambia where the majority of older persons live, poverty is more pronounced as eighty (80) percent of households headed by older persons fall below the poverty line. Illiteracy is also a common problem among many old people in rural Zambia. This is because many of the old people in Zambia had no opportunity to go to school due to colonial masters who restricted schools to their own people. The Zambia National Assembly Committee on Education (2009, p.5) has reported that *"the problem of illiteracy in Zambia is more pervasive among the rural population. There is stagnation in terms of the proportion of the population in rural areas that could freely read and write in any language, worse still interpret very simple statements. For example, between 1990 and 2000, more than 50% of the rural population were deemed illiterate as opposed to 33% of the urban population."*

Thus, with the above pathetic economic and social conditions in which most old people in rural Zambia find themselves in, they can easily be taken advantage of by politicians by politically abusing them. Empirical evidence globally shows that despite the conditions in which many old people find themselves in, many old people vote in presidential, parliamentary and local government elections as well as in other forms of elections (Uppal and LaRoChelle-Cote, 2011). Blais et al (2004) have reported that older generations get more involved in elections even if they have lower levels of educational attainment. Age has been found to matter a great deal when it comes to voting patterns. By using Canada as a case study, Uppal and LaRoChelle-Cote (2011) have reported that in 2011 the voting turnout rate was 50 percent among people age 18 – 24, and only a few percentage points higher among 25 -34 year olds. In contrast, older people are more likely to vote, with turn out rates increasing from 70 percent among 45-54 year olds to a peak of 82 percent among those ages 65 to 74. The rate dropped after age 74, a pattern also seen in the United States (US) Presidential elections. Sadly enough, many old people from the age of 65 and above tend to have health problems such as poor eye-sight and dementia. According to Ageways (2012, p. 4) “dementia” is an umbrella term describing a group of diseases that gradually cause brain cells to die. HelpAge International (2012, p. 4) argues that the word “dementia” describes a number of progressive brain diseases that affect a person’s memory, thinking, behavior and emotions. This suggests that dementia causes a person to have difficulty with cognitive functioning, that is, difficulties in thinking, remembering and reasoning. Research has established that dementia affects people later in life, generally over the age of 65 (World Alzheimer Report, 2013).

Despite the above facts about life from 65 and above, many old people from 65 and above still vote in elections globally (Uppal and LaRoChelle-Cote, 2011). Assuming that most of the old people in Zambia have dementia, it then raises serious concerns about their ability to make rational decisions when voting. Of course, the Zambian constitution has provisions on how to help certain voters. For example, the Zambian Electoral Act of 2006, p.43 on Assistance to Certain Voters states that *“the presiding officer or another election officer, at the request of a voter who is unable to read or due to physical disability, shall assist that voter in voting in the presence of – (a) a person appointed by or as an accredited observer or monitor, if available or (b) two election agents of different candidates, if available or (2) A person may assist a voter in*

voting if – (a) the voter requires assistance due to a physical disability (b) the voter has requested to be assisted by that person and that person has attained 18 years; (3) The secrecy of voting as stipulated in the constitution shall be preserved in the application of this section.”

However, the pertinent question that arises is: do the assisted old people cast their votes on the candidates of their own choice? From the evidence provided by the study participants, it is clear that they do not cast votes on candidates of their own choice. This has serious negative implications on the governance and democracy of Zambia as unwanted candidates can end up winning an election due to political abuse of some old people. Zambia has an electoral system of simple majority/First Past the Post (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2014). In practice, this means that one can win an election in Zambia even by just by one vote. Thus, the vote of one old person who is politically abused can make one political candidate become a winner and another loser.

Furthermore, the suggestion made by the participants to exempt some old people from voting is also in line with the proposals made by the various scholars globally on the right to vote. For instance, Mubiana (2015) has recommended that the right to vote in Zambia should be given to persons who have the requisite mental state to make right decisions for Zambia. He also proposes the need to have certain restrictions to the right to vote. In Italy where there is political gerontocracy for about 68 years now, there are serious public demands that political change should take place to shift power from the old people to the young people (Albertini, 2008). In the Vatican, the Cardinals who are aged 80 and above are not allowed to vote because of their old age (Glatz, 2015). Thus, it can be concluded that what the study participants proposed are part of the on-going global concerns about participation of certain categories of people in elections.

Finally an unanticipated solution that came out was the use of religion in addressing political abuse. In a critical manner, this solution is to do with changing the morals of the perpetrators of political abuse. For example, among the Christians it is morally wrong to abuse or exploit someone else (Ezekiel 45 verses 9-10 in King James Bible, 2013). Thus, by teaching good morals in the Zambian society on treatment of the old people, it is possible that some hearers of the message preached by religion can believe and stop abusing old people. For example, by helping perpetrators to know that political leadership comes from God, and not by manipulating the vulnerable in society (Romans 13 verses 1 – 2 in King James Bible, 2013), they may stop

manipulating the old people in an effort to win an election. Thus, the suggestion made by the participants is in line with the widely held religious values about human life and it should be adopted in the fight against political abuse. This is because political abuse is a complicated phenomenon and adequate ways of addressing it may require also changing people's attitude towards the old people for which religion can play a part.

Policy implications

This study has raised an important issue that is affecting some old people in Kalulu District, and most likely it could be happening in other parts of Zambia and the whole world. Given the fact that ageing is a normal process of human life which every human being expects to go through and the fact that the world is moving towards population ageing, evidence of political abuse among some old people in Kalulu should be taken seriously. The analyses of the main causes of this abuse and the abstract remedies suggested have to be transformed into public policy agendas. These raise the following policy implications:

First, there is need to consider exempting some old people like those with dementia, poor eye sights and illiterate from voting as suggested by the study participants that informed this study. Of course this is a contentious policy issue as it may be seen by other segments of society as disfranchising some old people. However, looking at the findings of this study, this policy implication should be seen to be for the good of some old people themselves, the people of Zambia and the world at large. This is because if it is implemented, it will reduce on political abuse of the old people and protect the tenets of democracy which the people of Zambia and the whole world are trying to promote.

Second, since illiteracy is one of the major causes of political abuse among some old people, adult literacy education should be encouraged in Kalulu Rural District and throughout the whole Zambia. Literacy citizen are needed as they happen to be important ingredient if families, communities and the whole Zambia have to attain appreciable level of political development (Mulenga, 2008). The importance of adult literacy programmes in addressing personal, community and national problems cannot be overemphasized as there is admirable empirical evidence that adult education makes people understand things that are hitherto beyond them. For

example in Chikuni community of Southern Province of Zambia where there is adult literacy programme, the primary beneficiaries have reported that they were able to vote without any assistance (Mate, 2013). However, in order to find sustainable solution to the problem of illiteracy in old age, there is need to have a national law to compel every Zambian child to complete at least basic education. This policy measure is in place in Finland and has helped Finland attain the literate rate of 100% for both male and female citizens from the age of 15 and above. Of course this calls for having quality basic schools within the reach of all the Zambian children (Hall and Midgley, 2004). Thus, without doubt if this policy measure is implemented, it will result in having few Zambian people reach old age illiterate.

Third, since politics is interested in every human being and that is why it affects every human being including the old people of all statuses (Mahajan, 2000), there is need to mainstream political education in the Zambian school curriculum from preschool to adult literacy education to university education. Here the focus should be to enable every Zambian citizen to understand their political rights, the barriers that prevent people from enjoying their political rights like political abuse of the old people and marginalized people in society as well as the negative effects of such barriers on national development.

Fourth, there is need to find ways and means of addressing income/material poverty among some old people in Kalulu Rural District and Zambia in general. One possible solution is for the Government of Zambia and other stakeholders such as the international donor community, the civil society and religious institutions to introduce social pension for all the old people in Zambia or targeted income support to all the income/material poverty stricken old people. This has the potential to improve the social welfare of the old people as the income given to them can enable them afford food, clothing and other basic necessities of life. This may prevent them from being vulnerable to politicians who want to take advantage of them due to their income/material poverty.

Fifth, there is need to improve the mechanisms for monitoring of voting among the old people who are illiterate, with poor eye-sight and those with mental lapses. This calls for making serious amendments to the current Zambia Electoral Act. As already indicated, the current Zambian Electoral Act on Assistance to Certain Voters states that ‘the presiding officer or another election

officer, at the request of a voter who is unable to read or due to physical disability, shall assist that voter in voting in the presence of – (a) a person appointed by or as an accredited observer or monitor, if available or (b) two election agents of different candidates, if available or 2. A person may assist a voter in voting if – (a) the voter requires assistance due to a physical disability (b) the voter has requested to be assisted by that person and that person has attained 18 years; (3) The secrecy of voting as stipulated in the constitution shall be preserved in the application of this section.’ (2006, p.43). For transparency in the way voters [old people] who want assistance when voting to be guaranteed, three amendments should be made to the Zambian Electoral Act and the Zambian constitution in general. First voters [old people] who want assistance when voting should be assisted only by the presiding officer. Second, when assisting that voter, the presiding officer should always be accompanied by all the election agents from all the political parties, and accredited election monitors or observers. The relatives of the voter [old person] should not be allowed to accompany that old person in the voting booth. Third, the presiding officer and all the election attendees who have assisted the voter should write their full names, national registration cards and the organizations they are representing against the name of the voter assisted. These measures may help prevent the situations where the ballot boxes can be turned upside down when voting by old people or hold the hand of the respective old person and make them vote for the candidate which is not of their choice.

Whilst they might be still some limitations in the above policy measures, I believe that if well implemented, the above measures can help address the problem of political abuse among some old people in Kalulu Rural District and Zambia in general. Furthermore, because of the complex issues associated with the above measures, their implementation require immediate concerted efforts from the Government of Zambia, Civil Society, the International donor community, old people themselves, the youth, religious institutions, community leaders and the academia.

Implications for future research

Because of the limitations of this study which include being qualitative in nature which does not allow generalisations of the findings of the study and also due to the small number of participants who participated in this study, future researches should investigate further how widespread the problem of political abuse among the old people in Zambia is. Because elder

abuse is a global problem, such researches should be undertaken in the various regions and countries across the world. Equally, because political abuse is a very sophisticated type of abuse, doing some ethnographic studies during times of elections in communities where old people live and in election venues should be encouraged. Future research should also focus on finding strategies for addressing political abuse among the old people.

NOTE

There is no potential conflict of interest regarding this manuscript. However, some of the materials especially definitions of elder abuse and references which I have used in this article have already appeared in the article [The Relevancy of Postmodernism in Understanding Elder Abuse: Implications on Social Work Education and Practice] which I have published in the Journal of Postmodernism Problems in Bulgaria. They may also appear in another article [Entitled - Additional types of elder abuse – Empirical evidence from Zambia] that is likely to be published in the Journal of Community Positive Practices in Romania.

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