

Politically Motivated Violence: The Safety and Security concerns of people with visual impairment

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to establish the extent to which safety and security concerns of people with visual impairment were catered for when politically motivated violence erupted. High stakes in elections, render the electoral process to serious risks of politically motivated violence. People with visual impairment may get maimed, killed or left with multiple disabilities. Politically motivated violence exposes voters and potential voters with visual impairment to serious safety, security and health concerns. For people with visual impairment especially the blind finding a safe place to take refuge can be a daunting task. This study used the qualitative paradigm, and was accordingly informed by the interpretative design. Opportunity sampling was made use of. Data was generated through interviews. The study found out that the safety and security of people with visual impairment was highly compromised in the event of violence. It was established that people with visual impairment exaggerated the potential danger they faced. It was also found out that sometimes police and security forces were often implicated as interested parties and active participants. It was therefore established that there were no guarantees of the safety and security of people with visual impairments. This study recommended that Electoral Authorities put in place strategies to guarantee the protection of people with visual impairment in the event of violence.

Key words : visual impairment, security, safety , politically motivated violence.

INTRODUCTION

Political violence is a menace that needs to be dealt with at any cost so that it does not continuously raise its ugly head each time there is an election. In Zimbabwe the period immediately before elections, during the elections and immediately after the elections is normally characterized by politically motivated violence. The violence is normally perpetrated by able-bodied people such as politicians and their supporters mainly the youths. People have been maimed and others have been killed because of the ensuing violence. Regrettably, the violence does not only negatively affect the able bodied but also spills on to people with disabilities notably those with visual impairment. It has far reaching effects on innocent members of the community who will be caught up in the crossfire, notably people with visual impairment. Political violence compromises the safety and security of people with visual impairment to a very large extent. This study therefore sought to expose the concerns, risks, apprehensions and worries of people with visual impairment relating to politically motivated violence and how it negatively impacts on their welfare and wellbeing.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

On 23 June 2018 there was an unexpected explosion at a political rally in Bulawayo, the second largest city in Zimbabwe. The explosion culminated in unprecedented damage to human life and property. It took the lives of two security personnel. Forty- seven other people were injured in the blast including one Vice President and a Cabinet Minister. Many other innocent people were caught in the crossfire and suffered various levels of injury. Even more worrying

was the recent political violence soon after the elections in Harare. Crime against people with disabilities has been described as reality that calls for attention.(Demmit, 2018).Findings based on National Crime Victimization Survey from (2009 to 2014) combined with data from the US Census Bureau' American Community Survey confirmed that the rate of serious crime against people with disabilities at (12,7 per 1000) was more than three times the rate of persons without disabilities at (3,9 per 1000 in 2010 to 2014) (Ibid) These statistics go a long way to confirm that the rate of victimization of people with disabilities was much higher compared to the able bodied and yet the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006) and other Zimbabwean laws such as the Disabled Persons Act (1992) guarantee unconditional protection from harm for people with disabilities. Confiscating weapons can ,curfews, incarceration rarely remove the source of violence. International Foundation for Electoral Systems.(2018)

Intimidation or threats of violence can go unnoticed if the information gathering mechanism is inadequate. (International Foundation for Electoral Systems <http://www.wifes.org>). People with visual impairment largely depend on their assistants or aides in order to flee the scene of violence for their safety. Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP, 2017). More often than not, those on whom people with visual impairment depend on for their safety and security also place high safety and security priority on themselves and this exposes people with visual impairment to serious vulnerability, lack of safety, lack of protection and defencelessness. (Ibid). In one study a participant indicated that “ I don't know what is safe and what is not and don't know when its safe” Some people with disabilities have actually ended up being raped by unscrupulous and zealous young party members. As was witnessed in the explosion incident in Bulawayo, people with disabilities were left on their own while the able bodied had to flee the political violence. Amongst the people attending the rally were people with disabilities and among them were some with visual impairment. For this group of people the risk of injury is high mainly due to the limited opportunity to escape the impact of the blast. The plight of people with disabilities therefore became more pronounced in situations of political violence when compared to able bodied people.(Zimbabwe Peace Project, 2017)

Similarly, during the 2008 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe, there was a very disturbing trend of politically motivated and sanctioned violence. (ZPP, 2017)Some people were killed and others injured in these disturbances. While authorities have not been keen on releasing the statistics for the numbers of victims of the mayhem, it was so obvious that these elections were quite a liability to the nation. People with sight have a number of options open to them in trying to manage the situation by either avoiding the source of the violence completely, or running away. (Munemo, 2015) Some can even fight back although the repercussions of doing this can be detrimental since the end result can involve being arrested and taken to court where one can be sentenced to many years in prison. One can also be injured or be maimed in the violence. Some people have ended up with disabilities as a result of politically motivated violence. Properties have also been lost due to political violence.

Regrettably, when politically motivated disturbances or riots take place in the communities, no one ever bothers to think about whether people with visual impairment are safe or not. If the effects of politically motivated violence can be so barbaric as to result in able -bodied people being maimed and killed, the situation should be even worse and really disastrous for people with visual impairment.

For people with visual impairment, politically motivated violence can have far reaching effects. By virtue of not having sight, or having limited sight, political violence presents serious challenges to people with visual impairment. During the 2008 elections a number of people

with visual impairment were victims of politically motivated violence and yet according to the (ZPP,2017) the hallmark of democracy is the ability of marginalized and vulnerable groups to take part in politics and the electoral process. In a study by Munemo, (2015) forty one (41) out of fifty (50) participants who were sampled agreed that politically motivated violence compromised the safety and security of people with visual impairment to a very large extent.

Visual impairment entails greater susceptibility to a variety of hazards and potential threats in daily life. (Saur, Hansen, Jansen, Heir,2016). The fear of electoral violence alone can create very devastating effects on people with visual impairment. It can lead to social withdrawal and isolation as well as traumatic events that may prove very difficult to manage. In another study participants reported sometimes feeling that a situation was outside of their control and they had very little choice other than to accept the risks. There is generally a sense of helplessness about not being able to assess the safety of the environment or the magnitude of politically motivated violence when it is about to break out or when it actually breaks out.

The following narration by Linda Jones in Demmit (2018) captures the experience of an individual with visual impairment. "I was across the street from a shooting once. So, I heard the shots, everybody sort of freaked out. And I looked up and thought those weren't firecrackers. And everybody was so freaked out that they couldn't talk to me. I was standing on the corner and trying to figure out, Whats going on"

When violence breaks out people with visual impairment don't know what is safe and what is not , and don't know when it's safe either. Safety in the environment or community is by right a universal concern, but people with visual impairment cannot afford to take this right for granted. They are at particular risk of not being able to recognize unsafe situations or environs. (Saur, etal 2016) Most of them may not be in a position to describe the visual characteristics of their assailants to the police for example. (Ibid) This makes them vulnerable to victimization from perpetrators of politically motivated violence.

Protection from any form of bodily harm is critical to all human beings. Zimbabwe, Human Rights, Rule of Law and Democracy (2013). People with visual impairment faced the double risk of being assaulted or abused through various ways. The chances of this happening are real and very high. Some perpetrators of politically motivated violence are people who are out to take advantage of the vulnerability of people with visual impairment. ZPP, (2017)As a result they can be robbed or be victims of rape by unknown assailants. Alongside the challenge of politically motivated violence, there is also the other risk of the invasion of people with visual impairments' personal and private space. Being followed by someone you don't know and cannot even see can also be quite debilitating. In a separate study, an individual with a visual impairment made reference to the apprehension brought about by being followed by unknown assailants. "When I go for walks, I have been followed. And so basically because of how society is today. I don't know who is around me. Not knowing my environment, not knowing who is around me, and if something happened to me I would not be able to tell anyone" The tense environment of politically motivated violence complicates many things , the major one being the safety and security guarantees for people with visual impairment.

Law enforcement agencies have not helped the situation either. They are compromised as evidenced by their taking of sides, with particular political entities. The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN) (2014) confirmed that the involvement of the police was viewed against a background of electoral violence and intimidation which were rampant in previous elections. ZESN further indicated that members of the police and security forces were often implicated in violence as active participants or for taking a passive role towards opposition

supporters. The involvement of the police in the maintenance of law and order was seen more as a risk of undue influence, fear and intimidation. Free will in the electoral process was therefore largely compromised. (ZESN, 2014 in Munemo, 2015). The new constitution in Zimbabwe (2013) now restricts police officers to maintaining law and order. The language used in the new provision for the role of the police in upholding law and order was peremptory and did not give police officers any discretion. It specifically states that the police. “(b) shall not interfere with the electoral processes”. (ibid).

Against this background, the study sought to establish the security and safety concerns of people with visual impairment in the face of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe.

Statement of the Problem

People with visual impairment face many security and safety related problems as a result of politically motivated violence. Politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe has presented a number of safety and security concerns that have shortchanged people with visual impairment.

Research Questions

- What are the safety and security concerns of people with visual impairment in the event of politically motivated violence breaking out ?
- To what extent has politically motivated violence shortchanged people with visual impairment?
- How can politically motivated violence be dealt with by authorities especially law enforcement Agencies and other stakeholders?

Significance of the study

The study will first and foremost be extremely important to people with visual impairment in that it will expose the challenges brought about by politically motivated violence in the country. There has been no research in this area in the country and it is hoped this study will bring to the fore a number of the difficulties that have been caused by politically motivated violence and the impact this has had on them. The study will also be helpful to politicians in that it will go a long way in exposing the negative effects of politically motivated violence as well as hopefully instill some discipline on their part since lives can be lost and people with visual impairment have been maimed. The study will also be important to law enforcement agencies in that they will get to know about the menace better and hopefully come up with better strategies to deal with the problem. Law enforcement agencies have been known to compromise their integrity by unnecessarily taking sides in the event of politically motivated violence breaking out. The need for law enforcement agencies to stick to their law enforcement duties is important and the police in particular needs to maintain this role at all costs. The researcher will also gain insight into the problem of politically motivated violence and what it does to people with visual impairment. The study will also be critical to future research in that other researchers can use it as a stepping stone to similar or related studies

Delimitations of the study

The study was carried out in Harare City and the Zimuto Rural Area of Masvingo in Zimbabwe. It involved participants with people with visual impairment in these areas. This arrangement enabled the researcher to get input from both an urban setting and a rural setting.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The nature of Political violence

Political violence takes a number of forms. The need to define politically motivated violence cannot be taken for granted for purposes of this study since it enables us to clearly appreciate

what in essence constitutes political violence. The Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) (2017) defines politically motivated violence as arson, being forced to kill, being forced to have sex with a relative or any other person against your will, abductions, compensation through livestock to Chiefs or other traditional leaders as fines, or being denied food handouts. Regrettably, victims of politically motivated violence were expected not to say anything and this amounts to harassment. (Ibid). In addition, those who acquired disability due to political violence were also expected to keep quiet. Other forms of political violence can include emotional abuse, labeling and people with disabilities not being accorded their right to exercise their rights as enshrined in the Constitution

Political violence was not unique to Zimbabwe only, but other countries in the world have experienced it too. The Australia Cross Disability Alliance (ACD) in Demmit (2018) also alluded to the challenge of politically motivated violence against people with disability in Australia. The ACD acknowledged that violence against people with disabilities was not from a few rogue individuals and was not limited by state or territory borders but that it was a national epidemic. This was a very worrying situation which presented quite a good number of challenges of its own in particular to the overall safety and security of people with visual impairment. The ACD actually went as far as calling for the need for a Royal Commission to look into this issue. This brings to the fore the shocking reality that violent crime against people with disabilities is indeed a reality that requires the attention of us all.

The situation for people with visual impairment is worsened by the fact that it happens to be the only disability category within which people are significantly less likely than people without disability to report to police when they have been the victim of a violent crime. (Ibid) This could be due to a number of factors. One of the reasons could be the fear of more reprisals to come in the event of the assailants having identified the people with visual impairment who will have identified them or reported them to the police. Another dimension could be that people with visual impairment could have been so used to victimization of different sorts and came to realize that help was never forthcoming from law enforcement agencies.

In Zimbabwe for example there are documented cases where people witnessed and singled out the Police as having compromised itself by taking sides with the ruling party during politically motivated violence. (ZESN 2014). In support of this position, the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) (2017) also confirmed that in Zimbabwe, the Police were compromised in the justice delivery system by making politically motivated violence against people with disabilities unpunishable. Reporting cases of political violence therefore remained a sheer waste of time. In Zimbabwe, the situation was further aggravated by the fact that traditional leaders have also become complicit in the fight against political violence since they like the police have openly become partisan as they take sides with the ruling party in particular. This was probably due to the fact that they were interested parties who stood to benefit from taking sides. Recently the independence of traditional leaders namely Chiefs appears to have been compromised as well by having vehicles being bought and given to them. In addition they also continue to receive other benefits from the government. A disturbing trend of government assistance to traditional leaders was that these benefits appear to be well timed because they only come towards elections thereby compromising their impartiality to those they serve. Compromising the impartiality of traditional leaders left no structures to report politically motivated violence in any way and this was very unhealthy for people with visual impairment. (ZPP, 2017) Youths in particular had no regard for the safety and security of people with disabilities. They were also compromised by promises of cash, clothing items and food handouts given by political parties' heavy weights. This left people with visual impairment vulnerable and at the mercy of violence. The extent of politically motivated violence was worse off for women and children with

disabilities. Children can be tortured in order to extract information from them and because of their defencelessness they can't retaliate. (Ibid).

Women with disability are particularly prone to unthinkable forms of abuse, such as being exposed to rape and other forms of sexual abuse. (ZPP, 2017). In a separate Report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) it was noted that visual impairment was the only disability category within which women were significantly more likely than man to have been victims of crime especially striking because among people with and without disability women are typically less likely than men to be victimized. This had far reaching implications on women with disability in that most perpetrators of politically motivated violence see women as soft targets of politically motivated violence or any other form of violence for that matter. Women were therefore more vulnerable to gross human rights violations in the form of violent crime than man or the able bodied.

Surprisingly for Zimbabwe, the 2013 Constitution, section 22(1) makes clear provisions for the recognition of the rights of people with disabilities as well as making sure that they were treated with dignity and respect. Section 53 of the Zimbabwean Constitution in particular makes provision for protection from physical or physical torture and from cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Section 83 of the Constitution (2013) makes a rather weird provision that assistance can only be rendered when resources permit. In addition the Country Report on Human Rights (2015) section 3 and 5 also has a part on "Freedom to participate in the political Process" The Disabled Persons Act (1992) also alludes to provisions for the protection of rights of people with disabilities. All these provisions appear not to have helped in effectively protecting people with disabilities.

Linda Jones, a blind woman who had the experience of being attacked by an unknown assailant had this to say. "This experience taught me not only to be constantly aware of what is happening around me but to allow my instincts to warn me when other people's behaviours don't seem normal'

The Zimbabwe Peace Project (2017) study, indicates the extent of abuse perpetrated against people with disabilities. In a grueling sexual abuse case, a twenty year old Mberengwa woman was sexually abused by Zanu PF youths as a way of punishment for wrongs purportedly done by her parents of supporting the opposition. The woman was gang raped by ZANU PF activists who took turns to rape her in full view of her parents who were helpless.(Ibid). The case was reported to the Police, but regrettably nothing was done, not even an attempt to investigate the case. This case clearly shows that in reality people with disabilities especially women were at serious risk rape, and beatings and they are powerless when it comes to fighting back as a way of protecting themselves.

In another case of political violence, a person with a visual impairment had this to say about the forms of violence. "Despite being visually impaired, youths from ZANU PF came to my homestead at night, they threatened to beat me up unless I told them of the whereabouts of my son, whom they accused of supporting the opposition" (ZPP 2017). In the same study another villager with a visual impairment in the Gutu area of Masvingo said "We with disabilities and our families have no protection and we suffer greatly the impact of conflict in our communities." The ZPP also confirms the case of a man in his eighties who now had a disability and was using a wheelchair as a result of political violence. A local church organization assisted him to secure the wheelchair. People with disabilities are in constant fear of what is generally referred to as being on the wrong side. (Ibid) There also remains a lot of undocumented cases of politically motivated violence in the communities. This was a source of anxiety and worry on

the part of people with disabilities and their families. Political leaders have no regard whatsoever for the safety and security of people with disabilities.

METHODOLOGY

This study was primarily informed by the qualitative paradigm. The Interpretive design was used in line with the qualitative paradigm. The nature of the enquiry required that the use of the qualitative approach was the best in the circumstances. One major assumption of the qualitative paradigm was that true meaning was determined by the views and position of different people and therefore not standard as is the case for the quantitative research paradigm. (Merriam, 1998) An exceptional dimension with qualitative research is that a researcher is never bogged down by some predetermined straitjacket or categorization of phenomenon like is the case with quantitative research. The researcher focuses on selected specific issues without the burden of unnecessary predetermined influence of previous experience or what is generally seen or assumed as the societal norm. Cresswell, (2006) underscores the fact that qualitative research enhance improved understanding of social and human problems based on building a complex and holistic picture drawn from the interpretation of detailed views and positions of participants and informants' words in their natural settings. Qualitative research therefore entails an interpretive and naturalistic approach to subject matter. (Denzin and Lincoln 2005)

Research Design

The major role of a design is to assume the role of a plan of action which should be in a position to harmonize both the philosophical foundations and methodological assumptions of a research approach to the research methods. In line with this understanding, this study made use of the interpretive design. This design deals with analytical reflection of mainly the practices that present meaningful practices. Basically the nature of the type of knowledge one seeks or the philosophical orientation one has adopted determines the selection of the research design, the research methods to be used, as well as the sampling techniques and data gathering strategies. (Munemo, 2015). The researcher therefore took advantage of the interpretive design, mainly because of its conviction in the power of words, where people's words were the basic element of analysis. In addition the interpretive design is subjective and focused on individual interpretation unlike quantitative designs that considered use of statistical procedures as some straight jacket into which knowledge must fit. On the basis of the strengths of the qualitative paradigm, the interpretive design has shared interpretation, which is the basis of knowing meaning and discovery. (Tichapondwa, 2013). The interpretive design is therefore quite distinctive in its approach as a research design, concept formation, data analysis and standards of assessment. (Flick 2007) It was also very good for the purpose of building consensus. The researcher was therefore strongly influenced by the clear and basic assumptions of the interpretive design in arriving at a decision to adopt it for purposes of this study. The major goal of the interpretive design was solely to gain sight and expose depth, richness and complexity that is inherent in the phenomenon. The major characteristics of this design are that it is holistic and it has a firm belief in open communication. In addition it is complex and broad which are the critical basis of knowing meaning and discovery.

Target population

The target population for the study comprised of people with visual impairment who qualified to vote in elections in Zimbabwe these were over the age of eighteen. It also involved advocacy groups of and for people with visual impairment.

Sampling and sampling procedure

Opportunity sampling was used. This is a non-probability sampling technique, where participants are selected based on naturally occurring groups (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Data were gathered from people who were easily available and willing to participate based on convenience. Opportunity sampling is normally used to study hard to access groups of people such as people with visual impairment. People with visual impairment are not a homogenous group. One may not easily find them concentrated at a particular place hence the researcher opted for opportunity sampling.

Due to considerations to do with data saturation a sample of 20 individuals with visual impairment was selected and interviewed from selected provinces in Zimbabwe. In addition, officials from Organisations of and for people with Visual Impairment were interviewed as well, as part of the sample. Officials who were representatives of advocacy groups of and for people with visual impairment were interviewed as part of the sample. The sample comprised of 27 males and 13 females was drawn from five provinces of Zimbabwe.

Data generation procedures

Data collection is the process of disciplined inquiry through gathering and analysis of empirical data. Best and Kahn, (1993). This study primarily used interviews to generate data for specific reasons which will be clearly outlined below.

Interviews

The researcher carried out interviews with individuals with visual impairment as well as officials from organizations of people with visual impairment. Appointments were made to visit these individuals at their work places depending on the time that was most convenient to the participants. Interviews entailed generating data through face-to-face interactions with participants.

Interviews have several strengths (Creswell, 2007; Borg and Gall, 1996). Through the use of interviews, the researcher was assured that no data was omitted; easily clarified the data being given when he/she suspected that a participant was giving false information through non-verbal cues for example facial expressions and voice tone; obtained data from a cross section of participants such as the illiterate, the aged and the young; created a conducive environment; participants provided useful supplementary information by way of spontaneous reactions, something which cannot be done under other conditions; face-to-face interaction facilitated verbatim recording of responses, which provides useful feedback that can be further probed and clarified; the researcher cross-checked the data if it was truly authentic; and enabled to use a recording device (ie a tape recorder). This helped the interviewer to concentrate on listening carefully and probing the interviewee. The use of a recording device effectively dealt with the problem of asking questions and recording responses simultaneously.

Interviews also had weaknesses. However, the researcher crafted advance strategies for managing the disadvantages. In order to counter the challenge of interviewing and recording manually, negatively affecting the flow of the interactions, the researcher complemented this process by recording the whole interview. Recording was done after securing the consent of the participants. This helped later in identifying specific areas or details that could have been missed during the interview process. The researcher also kept focus of the essence of the interview to avoid getting carried away unnecessarily. The researcher did his best to refrain from being influenced by the personal attributes of participants and informants. Concerning the challenge posed by the degree of anonymity emanating from interviews resulting in a possibility of participants and informants withholding data, the researcher dealt with this

aspect by assuring the participants and informants that the data generated was only for purposes of the study and that their identities could not be known since pseudonyms were used .

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study were categorized into specific themes namely the following.

- disregard for the safety concerns of people with visual impairment,
- the role of law enforcement agencies,
- the role of the sighted community,
- self defense training for people with visual impairment,
- an enabling environment for a peaceful environment for the administration of credible elections and
- encouraging collaboration and shared responsibility

Disregard for the Safety and Security Concerns of People with Visual Impairment

The study found out that there was disregard for the safety and security concerns of people with disabilities. This could be because of a number of reasons. One of these could be the fact that people with disabilities have always been regarded as second class citizens. This may not be surprising considering that throughout the evolution of special needs education, people with disabilities have not been taken seriously. This attitude has remained entrenched in society and has obviously survived the test of time. As a consequence it largely remained accountable to the current state of affairs where up to this day society still finds itself stuck with this erroneous belief. Concerns of people with visual impairment were not being taken seriously. They had a number of concerns that they raised. One participant had this to say :

“If political violence breaks out, the risk of running towards the source of the violence was high especially when considering the fact that during disturbances or riots the sighted forgot about the plight of visually impaired people. You will be left on your own as others consider only their own safety as important”.

Some of the participants gave harrowing experiences of how they narrowly escaped injury or death as a result of political violence.

Another participant shared her experiences as indicated below:

“As I was running away to safety, I fell into a ditch at my rural home. As a result I suffered a dislocation and had to be rescued by other villagers who heard my calls for help. I won’t forget that encounter because I had to get treatment and physiotherapy at a local hospital for three months.”

Political violence therefore exposed people with visual impairment to numerous forms of risks including serious injury including permanent injury, disability, or even death.

Another participant noted that:

“It is very bad, we do not know where to run to or who to trust when there is violence.”

Another dimension could be that due to the negative perception through which people with disabilities have been viewed against, any effort to put in place measures aimed at protecting them have really never been taken seriously by either policy makers or other stakeholders. This could also have been aggravated by the fact that political violence by its very nature happens when no one really expects it to happen. It is therefore difficult to prepare for it since it has always caught people unaware. This finding agrees with Tefera (2010) and Wapling (2010) who indicated that for decades disability has been viewed as a curse, people a sin, or

punishment for the bad deeds parents and these traditional beliefs have affected the way people with disabilities are perceived in the community.

THE ROLE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

It was established that law enforcement Agencies such as the police were not cooperative when it came to providing the basic safety and security guarantees. Police found themselves entangled in a dilemma in which they were an interested party and therefore found themselves compromised mainly due to the fact that on one side they wanted to please their masters, the ruling party, and on the other they were also expected to serve people with disabilities by protecting them from the effects of politically motivated violence. This saw them opting to serve their masters than people with disabilities.

One participant had this to say:

It's a waste of time to report to the Police since they won't take any action. They will ask you to bring the suspect to the station which only helps to further compromise your safety if you do so.

This way of doing things left people with visual impairment with more questions than answers. Another explanation could be that if the police was not doing this on their own volition they were getting orders from either top government officials or high ranking politicians most likely from the ruling party or other opposing party. Because of such compromises on the part of the police people with visual impairment found it difficult to report some of the cases of political victimization by supporters of some parties. This finding also agrees with the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP) (2017) which confirmed that in Zimbabwe, the Police were compromised in the justice delivery system by making politically motivated violence against people with disabilities unpunishable. The Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network ZESN,(2014), also agreed that the involvement of the police in the maintenance of law and order was seen more as a risk of undue influence, fear and intimidation and that free will in the electoral process was therefore largely compromised. (ZESN, 2014).

Role of the Sighted Community

The study revealed that as for the sighted community in as much as they may want to assist, their hands were also tied up. They also feared victimization once suspected of belonging to what they called "the wrong side" meaning being associated with the opposition especially. A participant recounted her experience as follows:

Youths from one of the mainstream parties threatened to beat up some of my neighbours if they did not tell them where two of my cousins were hiding. My cousins were well known for being political activists of a rival party. Those youths were in a bad mood and were not prepared to listen to any excuses. My neighbours were only rescued when one of the youths who was a relative persuaded his peers to further consult their superiors thereby suspending the onslaught.

Another way of accounting for the indifference of the sighted community could be that some sections of society do not want to be associated with people with visual impairment and would rather not be bothered at all. Some people prefer to mind their own business and don't worry about the needs of a person with a disability at all until it happens to their own child, a close family member or themselves.

Self Defence Training for people with Visual Impairment

The general consensus among people with visual impairment was that there was need for self defence training to equip people with visual impairment with some skills to protect themselves

from harm by overzealous people especially party youths and other such like minded individuals. People with visual impairment could have arrived at this decision realising that when violence erupts they have no idea where to run to. This is exacerbated by the fact that when the able bodied flee violent scenes they forget about the safety of those with visual impairment. Those with visual impairment could therefore have some hope in being equipped with self defence skills. One female participant indicated her experience thus:

“A well known political activist in my area threatened me with rape in order to buy my safety and security. My assailant struggled to pull me down, but I fought him with anything that I could lay my hands on. I also called out loudly for other neighbours to rescue me from this ordeal .Thanks to one of my neighbours who heard my calls for assistance and came to my rescue“

Another issue could be that sighted people, who are the perpetrators of violence against people with visual impairment take undue advantage of people with visual impairment because of their vulnerability. Able bodied people realise that these people cannot defend themselves when there are such challenges. Since violence against people with visual impairment does not only entail physical violence, but other forms like sexual abuse and emotional abuse. This finding is not in isolation as it tallies with a similar finding by the Zimbabwe Peace Project (2017) which confirms the case of a 20 year old woman from Mberengwa who was gang raped by youths from the ZANU PF Party. The ZPP (2017) also confirms another typical case of physical violence of an elderly man in Zimbabwe who was physically hurt to the extent of ending up with a disability and was now using a wheelchair donated to him courtesy of a local Church Organisation.

The need for Credible Elections and a Peaceful environment

It was found out that the major source of the politically charged and motivated violence was the lack of an environment that fulfilled the basic tenets of peaceful and credible elections. This finding could have been premised on the fact that stakes were very high on political parties that participated in elections. Because of this, players expected to win elections at any cost. It is probably this drive that motivates people especially youths, to act the way they do to secure a win even where it is not merited. The need for an enabling environment to kick start the process of creating a mutually peaceful environment cannot be overemphasized. Once the electoral environment is not peaceful and credible there is high potential for violence. It is this violence that ultimately affects people with visual impairment. Normally people with visual impairment are caught in the crossfire and by virtue of their visual impairment they find themselves with nowhere to take refuge. Another explanation could be the issue of typical hooligans who take advantage of the confusion and chaos thereby harming other innocent people for their selfish gains. People with visual impairment have regrettably been victims of these individuals who take advantage of the mayhem and end up raping or physically harming innocent people who include people with visual impairment. In some cases people with visual impairment may actually be activists themselves, but this should not make them victims of political violence. They only become victims of politically motivated violence because of their vulnerability compared to the others who can secure their safety and security at a relatively “better price”. This finding was not in isolation, it was similar to findings from the American Foundation for the Blind (2018) which also alluded to the need for the need to enabling a peaceful environment that would eventually lead to the administration of credible elections. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2018) also weighed in, supporting this finding by indicating that the credibility of electoral processes often lead to increased legitimacy of governments thereby reducing the risk of political turmoil.

Encouraging Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

The study also established that the lack of a shared responsibility and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders was a major cause and source of concern that has culminated in the challenges that leads to politically charged environments. This marks the beginning of challenges of politically motivated violence that negatively affects people with visual impairment. People with visual impairment could have arrived at this position after realising that there appears to be no one who really wanted to take responsibility or the lead to assist them in the event of problems that arose due to politically motivated violence. No one is accountable to the violence related challenges that bedevil people with visual impairment. Authorities appear to have no notion of what needs to be done. The situation is probably worsened by a compromised police force. On the other hand the plight of people with visual impairment is not taken as a priority area. This could be further aggravated by the fact that the area of politically motivated violence is one area where non-governmental organizations have not taken an active role in. They could have been motivated by the fact that in areas where NGOs for people with disabilities were active such issues could hopefully receive some attention worth noting by especially the Authorities in the form of various Government Ministries, law enforcement agencies and other interested partners such as Advocacy groups and other critical stakeholders. People with visual impairment could also have been motivated to take this position by the fact that they realize that a trans-disciplinary approach to the challenges of political violence perpetrated against people with disabilities in general and people with visual impairment in particular was probably the best strategy to resolve issues in this day and time. The need for collaboration is not unique to Zimbabwe alone but the International, Community also shares similar experiences for example in Australia, the Australia Cross Disability Alliance (2014) concurred that “violence against people with disabilities was not from a few rogue individuals and was not limited by state or territory borders. It was a national epidemic that needed a Royal Commission”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings above the following recommendations are being proposed:

- Various stakeholders should come together to come up with strategies for effective collaboration and shared responsibility.
- The Electoral Authorities needed to come up with an environment that enhanced credible elections. There should be no room for suspicions because suspicions were the root cause of politically motivated violence
- Political players especially competing political parties should educate their members especially the youths on the dangers of politically motivated violence since youths were the major culprits when it comes to political violence
- Law enforcement Agencies should be professional and maintain their neutrality in ensuring the safety and security of people with visual impairment and refrain from taking sides with competing political players.
- There was also need for various stakeholders such as Non- governmental organisations, Religious entities and the Electoral Body to take the lead in creating awareness on the challenges of promoting politically motivated violence and putting a stop to it because it disadvantages people with visual impairment.
- Lastly organisations of people with disabilities also need to redouble their efforts in doing advocacy work to discourage and condemn politically motivated violence

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