

Psycho-Social Healing: An Invitation to Reflexive Peacebuilding in Mutoko Post 2008 Political Violence in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: The paper used qualitative methodology and a case study of Mutoko was used as a research design. The study used 60 participants including key informants. The major findings of this paper indicated that, causes of political violence in Mutoko include but are not limited to sanctions, militarisation of politics, murdering of political activists and belief in one party state. More so, effects of political violence necessitates the creation of youths militias, trauma and forced displacements in Mutoko

Keywords: Political Violence, Peace, Peacebuilding, and Violence

INTRODUCTION

Politically motivated violence is wide spread and a characteristic feature in most African countries. In Africa, time for elections is more than an opportunity to exercise people's constitutional rights to elect their representatives, it is a season of upheaval and uncertainty as noted by (Mukuhlani, 2014) The irony of elections is that, those who seek the mandate of the electorate by contesting at all levels of government, are the same people who unleash violence on the people they expect to vote for them. Anecdotal evidence however, indicates that political violence is more pronounced during electoral seasons (Vambe, 2014). It is also generally observed that electoral violence has disproportionate impact on citizens, with the poor and marginalized communities the most affected (Burchard, 2015). It is not a secret that electoral violence contributes towards many negative outcomes including physical, psychological, social and emotional harm to the victims, their families and the affected communities. These harms and their after-effects can last for many years after the actual violent acts have lapsed.

Zimbabwe like many other African countries notably Kenya, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, have become known more for their violent electoral processes and disputed election results. Elections in these emerging democracies have become seasons of chaos, violence and a slap in the face of democratic principles as postulated by (Masunungure, 2013). These election periods are characterised by rampant human rights violations arising from the unorthodox campaign strategies by competing political parties. While the results of elections are celebrated by the strongest or most violent party of the day, they cause cracks, divisions and enduring stress between and within communities (Gwenya and Harris, 2016). A case in point is Zimbabwe's

2008 wide spread electoral violence and its destructive aftermath. This research sought to establish effects of politically motivated violence on the lives of people in Mutoko. It also interrogated the causes of pre and post-election violence in Zimbabwe with special reference to Mutoko and explored how psychosocial healing can be used to promote and ensure peacebuilding.

Electoral violence is a cross cutting problem in emerging democracies, especially in the African continent where political candidates contesting for office cannot view each other beyond ideological differences but rather as declared enemies. The language of hate and violent skirmishes are used to sow seeds of political rivalry, with grassroots supporters pitted against each other in violent ways. The UN 2008 Human Rights Country Reports estimated politically motivated killings in Zimbabwe as hovering above 200 deaths, with other victims suffering different scars of brutality (Zimbabwe Peace Project, 2015) concurs with UN reports regarding the brutality of pre and post 2008 elections. These figures include victims in Mutoko, some of whom survived the ordeal but are suffering from traumatic problems 10 years after the violence has been perpetrated. There are few studies that directly address the role and efficacy of psychosocial healing in the post conflict societies in the Zimbabwean context. This study therefore, seeks to evaluate the relevance and role of psychosocial healing in peacebuilding.

Moreover, on 29 March 2008, Zimbabwe held a harmonised poll that was decisive. The decisiveness of these elections were based on two major pillars namely, the question of land redistribution and the strength of the largest opposition party, the Movement of Democratic Change. At that time, the late President Mugabe

led Government was besieged with economic challenges emanating from sanctions arising from the disputed land acquisition programme which were viewed as chaotic and partisan. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), the body charged with the organising and running of elections in the country, announced parliamentary results but withheld presidential results for over a month (IDASA, 2008). The body never gave plausible reasons for the delayed announcement of results. This left the people to speculate as to what might have happened, with the MDC party and its supporters claiming that their presidential candidate, the then Morgan Tsvangirai had won the election. The speculation went viral, setting in motion premature celebrations from the MDC camp. The celebrations irked the ruling ZANU PF party and resulted in skirmishes between the opposing supporters. Eventually, ZEC announced the much awaited results of the Presidential election on 2 May 2008, a month after the elections were held. (Makumbe, 2009) highlighted that, the results showed MDC's candidate, Morgan Tsvangirai, had secured 47.9 percent while ZANU PF's Robert Mugabe secured 43.2 percent of the vote. The result meant that no candidate had won this election as the Constitution required a candidate to secure 51 percent to be declared a 34winner. As a matter of constitutionality, ZEC went on to announce a presidential run-off election pitting MDC's Tsvangirai and ZANU PF's Mugabe. The date for the run-off was set for 27 June 2008.

The announcement of the presidential run-off was marked by a shift of events in the political atmosphere across the breath and length of the country. It seemed that the late President Mugabe was irked by the purported loss to the late Tsvangirai, his long-time political rival. The period leading to the run-off presidential election was poisoned with violence as supporters from the two contesting parties went in overdrive mood, using unorthodox campaign strategies. The politically motivated violence led to loss of lives, serious injuries, burnt houses and destruction of property. While both parties contributed to this violence, it was mainly the opposition members affected by the aftermath of the violence. (Masunungure, 2013) argued that, it was in such cases where attempts to seek protection from the police force were not forthcoming. With various repressive laws supporters suffered more because they could not stand the power of state institutionalised violence which involved the security agents and

ZANU PF sponsored militias as recorded by (Crisis Coalition in Zimbabwe, 2014). Cases were reported where the provoked returned violence with violence albeit in attempts to defend themselves. It was in such cases where attempts to seek protection from the police force were not forthcoming. Instead, it was victims who were labelled perpetrators and charged with various repressive laws which were applied along partisan lines.

Additionally, (Muzondidya, 2011) submitted that, while it was generally agreed among political parties (PPs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Election Observer Missions (EOMs) among other stakeholders, that violence was prevalent, they differed on the dynamics of the violence. The differences were in terms of the causes, extent, nature and origin of the acknowledged violence (Muzondidya, 2011). Each of the concerned rival parties pointed blame to the other, justifying the involvement of their supporters as a necessary response in self-defence and a reaction to provocation by supporters of the other party. Failure by the rival political parties to shoulder responsibility exacerbated the 2008 PERO induced political violence. On 24 June 2008, the MDC presidential candidate formerly withdrew his participation from the run-off election, citing the escalation of both political intimidation and violence against his supporters. The withdrawal was rejected by ZEC, as the commission cited violation of the Electoral Act due to the withdrawal timeframe (IDASA, 2008). Surprisingly, despite the withdrawal, violence and terror mainly against opposition activists and supporters did not stop. The areas which were most affected were those in rural areas where the balance of support was not in favour of ZANU PF.

Furthermore, while presidential elections in Zimbabwe were characterised by politically motivated violence, 2008 PERO stands out above the rest in terms of the form and extent of violence. Prior to 2008, ZANU PF faced election challenges mostly in urban areas where MDC candidates were popular. However, with the economic decline at its peak towards the 2008 elections, the government's capacity to provide food handouts as social support to the rural population, was severely curtailed (Zamuchiya, 2013). In response, the rural population began to feel the effects of ZANU PF led government economic policies hence the drastic shift of political allegiance from ZANU PF to MDC. Realizing the invasion of its traditional

support base by opposition, ZANU PF went out in full force to recapture the rural vote albeit with the use of violence as postulated by (Makumbe, 2009). It is from such background that the 2008 PERO were the most violent and claimed the biggest number of victims hence its selection for this study.

METHODOLOGICAL OUTLINE

The approach followed in this study is qualitative descriptive research methodology as it enabled the narration and interpretation of nature/extent of the role of psychosocial support in peacebuilding in Mutoko district of Zimbabwe. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants for in-depth interviews. Data were collected through focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and documentary reviews so as to triangulate the evidence. Ten key informants were interviewed and five focus group discussions consisting of fifteen participants were administered to collect data pertaining to peace building through psychosocial healing post 2008 Presidential run off in Mutoko. A total of 60 respondents participated in this research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Lederach's Conflict Intervention and Peace Building Pyramid

This study was guided by the conflict intervention and peace building pyramid theory as stipulated by Lederach, (1997). On that note, Lederach acknowledges that for any given conflict situation, there are many different possibilities to approach conflict transformation work which he terms lenses. This study is informed by Lederach's conflict intervention and peace building pyramid of actors' approach. Lederach's pyramid gives to that all sectors of a society must participate in the

building of peace. In this view, (Lederach, 1997) presumes that in many conflict situations especially when dealing with society-wide conflicts, there is a hierarchy present in the wider surroundings of the conflict the society at large which is reflected in the conflict itself. He further put forward that when analysing a hierarchical situation, people are then inescapably faced with the necessity of choosing where to start within this structure, thus the choice between "top-down+" and "bottom-up" approaches. In short, a top-down approach would assume that the people at the top of the hierarchy ("the leaders") are in a position to determine the course of the conflict, whereas a bottom-up approach would assume that those at the bottom ("the grassroots") are able to lay secure foundations for future (Lederach, 1997). (The Academy for Conflict Transformation, 1998) asserts that, Lederach's 'Pyramid of Actors' allow people to narrow down the search for the right actors to carry out particular approaches to conflict transformation.

(Lederach, 1995) presupposes an emphasis on long term peace building, involving complementary roles of human and material resources within the various levels of society rather than mediation of external actors. Those levels are represented by a pyramid of the affected population, a wider part of which is represented by grassroots leaders (community leaders, leaders of local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), refugees camp leaders), followed by a narrower part of middle-range leaders (ethnic, religious leaders, academics, experts, leaders of humanitarian and NGOs), and a country's political and military top leaders and is demonstrated below (Lederach, 1997).



Fig 1: Level of Leadership and their building peace

Level 1: Top Level Leadership

The top leadership is a small group sharing characteristics of high visibility, power and influence. Top leaders generally have more influence, because they are more visible and benefit from established hierarchical structures. The top leadership usually does not experience the direct occurrence of the conflict but the grassroots and sometimes they are even feared by the society itself. Drawing from (Lederach, 1997) theoretical perspectives it is however essential to take note of the fact that, top leadership does not take cognisance of the post conflict traumatic challenges and the actual need for psychosocial healing in the post conflict society.

Level 2: Mid-Range Leadership

Though they might be several ways to think about the middle range (Lederach, 1997) observes that they occupy formal positions of power or leadership, but are not always part of or controlled by governmental systems, or formal opposition movements. These people are expected to play the roles of carrying out problem solving workshops, training in conflict resolution, peace commissions and insider partial teams. (Tocci, 2008) presumes that mid and grassroots CSOs also induce conflict transformation by fostering societal reconciliation, through inter-communal dialogue, peace commissions and by fostering functional cooperation and communication across communities. (Tocci, 2008) posits that more

importantly, civil society links the three formalised levels of society in Lederach's pyramid. Mid-range leadership appreciate the need for psychosocial healing and many at times they make frantic efforts to achieve the same.

Level 3: Grassroots Level

The level represents the base of the society in analysis. According to (Lederach, 1997) "during a conflict situation, life among the majority of people here is characterized by day-to-day problems, perhaps even the fundamental need to find the food, water and shelter they need for survival." The leaders have expert knowledge of the local situation, direct personal experience of the hostilities, and witness to the daily manifestations of the prejudices, discriminations and emotions behind the conflict. Level three involves putting in place local peace commissions to promote and monitor peace, training grassroots community groups, programs designed to reduce levels of stereotyping and prejudice and culturally appropriate psychosocial and trauma healing programs. Moreover, (Lederach, 1997) submitted that, there is vertical and horizontal interaction between various actors. This interaction however, is very pertinent in ensuring inclusiveness and sharing different perspectives in as far as conflict transformation is concerned.

Intervention Pyramid for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Peace Building (a Layered Comprehensive Approach IASC 2007)

The field of mental health and psychosocial support in situations of armed conflict and political violence has suffered from excessive polarisation and extremist claims such as everyone is traumatised or alternately, no one is traumatised. The risk, resilience, and protective factors framework recognizes that in every population, some people are likely to do well and exhibit resilience whereas others may be overwhelmed, dysfunctional and in need of specialised support. A convenient way to represent this is the familiar intervention pyramid (IASC, 2007), which offers a useful conceptual framework for situating the need for different kinds of supports and suggesting how they might be interconnected. Following armed conflict, the majority of people, who are represented mainly by the bottom layer, will recover without any psychosocial intervention so long as they have access to basic services and security.

Although they might experience distress and symptoms of acute stress reactions, the provision of security and access to basic services enables the activation of local supports by family, friends, and community groups among others. The next layer includes people such as those who have been separated from their families or who lack access to livelihoods or education and who also need supports such as family tracing and reunification supports or livelihoods supports. (IASC, 2007) indicated that, the third layer includes people such as elderly people who have no supports and have suffered many losses; war widows who are overcome with grief and loss and are isolated; women survivors of rape who are badly stigmatized and need additional psychological and social support; and formerly recruited children who may lack livelihoods, have substance abuse issues, and are stigmatised and feared by the community. People in this layer need focused

psychosocial support though they may be administered by trained social workers and paraprofessionals rather than clinicians or psychiatrists. The top layer includes severely affected people who need specialized support, possibly from specialists such as psychiatrists or traditional healers. This level might include people who suffer overwhelming grief, severe expressions of PTSD and also people who suffer depression, neurological disorders, and chronic mental illness. In this framework, trauma is only a small part of a much larger array of severe sources of distress.

The pyramid serves as a reminder of the importance of building comprehensive, layered systems of mental health and psychosocial support with referral mechanisms across the layers. In general, holistic community-based systems are ill equipped to provide appropriate care and support for those who have been most severely affected. To build a comprehensive system of peace building through psychosocial healing in Mutoko, it is essential to strengthen or create supports at multiple layers, linking in systematic ways specialised supports with more holistic, community-based supports. Sadly, such comprehensive systems are seldom seen in the aftermath of African conflicts but remain an important target for future work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biographical Data of Respondents

Gender

35 (58.3%) of the participants were females, this was due to the fact that women are more than men in terms of population in rural areas. Most of the men in Mutoko have migrated to Harare and Mozambique in search of employment opportunities and some have even crossed the border into the neighbouring country of Mozambique. Males constituted 25(41.7%) of this study since most of them are the family bread winners, they have been affected by rural to urban migration in order to cater for their families.

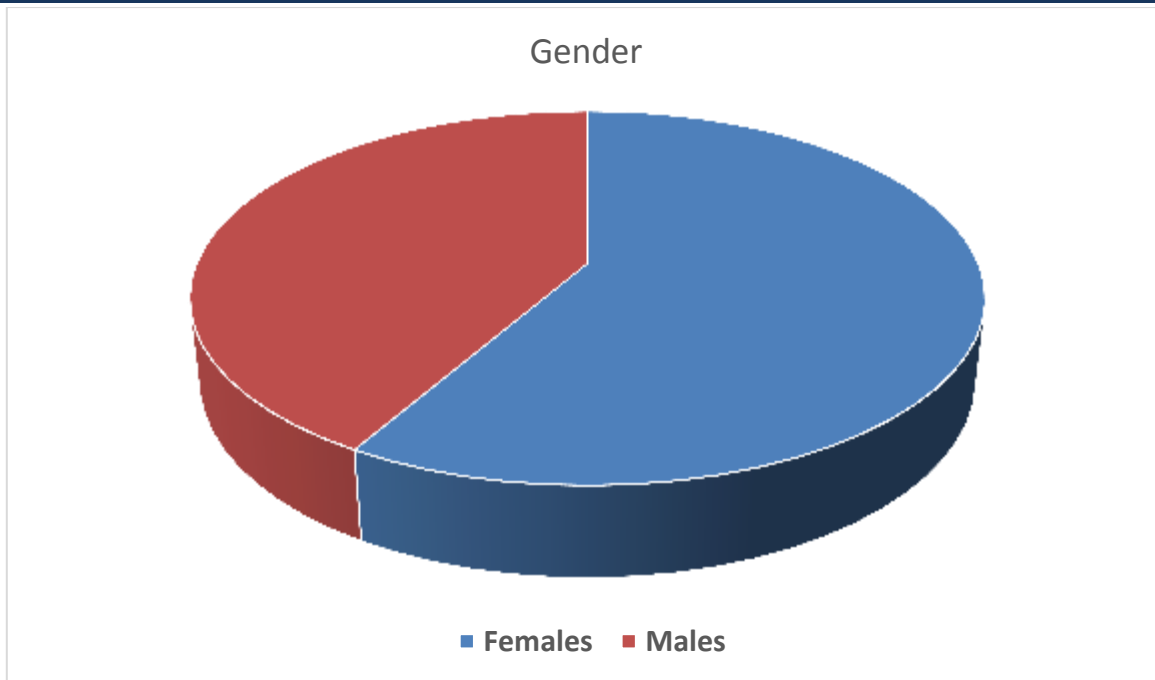


Fig 2: Representation of participants by gender
Source: primary data (2021)

Table 1: Age of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
20-35	26	43.3
36-45	17	28.3
46-55	11	18.3
56-65	5	8.3
66+	1	1.6
Total	60	100.0

Source primary data (2021)

The age distribution of the sample highlighted that respondents came from different age groups. The study highlighted that 26 (43.3%) of the respondents were between the age of 20-35. The second highest number of respondents were 17 (28.3%) were between the age of 36-45. Followed by those between the ages of 46-55 being 11 (18.3%). Moreover, those between the age of 56-65 were quite few being 5 (8.3%) and only 1(1.6%). The dominating age group is between the ages of 20-35 because they are young and energetic and they have many political ambitions and hopes since the majority of them are households. The active and young groups form the fertile ground for politicians to manipulate and use them because of their desperate situations coupled with high levels of unemployment, they are the most vulnerable group to poverty, early marriages as well as political hooliganisms and violence. Therefore, their involvement in this research have gone a long way in defining the real picture of the relevance of psychosocial peace building in their

constituency. Generally, those above the age of fifty were very few because most of them prefer to stay at home and they do not like to be involved in political activities.

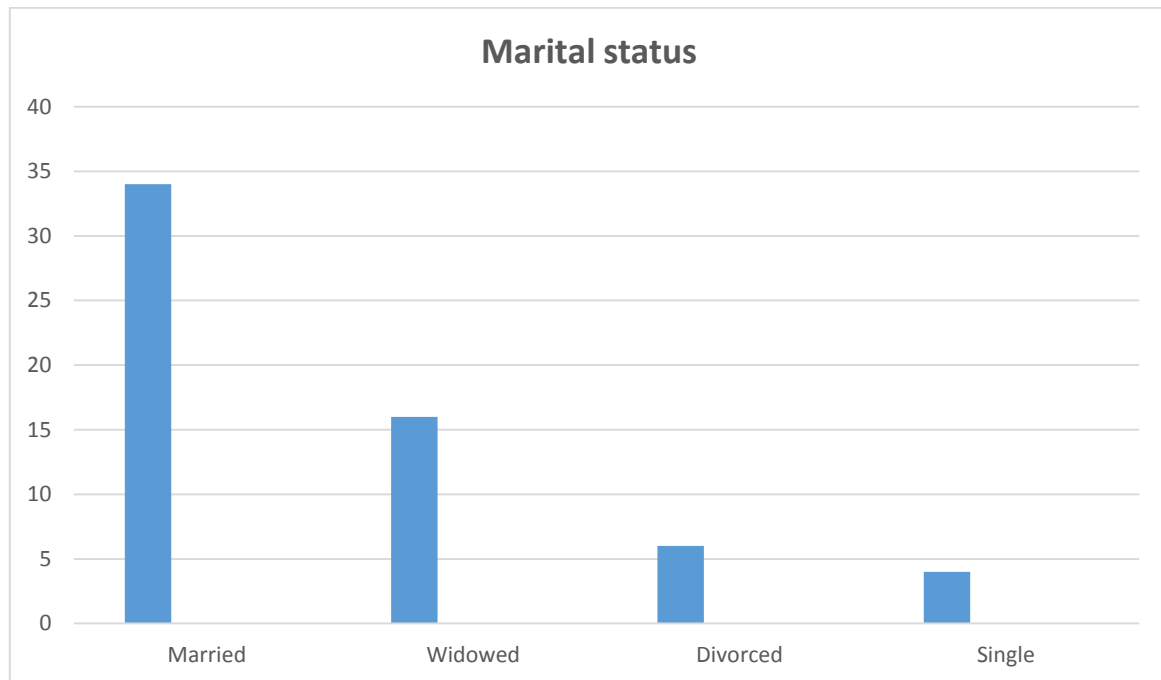
Marital Status of the Respondents

Most respondents 34 (56.6%) showed that, they were married and 16 (26.6%) highlighted that they were widowed. More so, 6 (10%) constituted the divorced and 4 (6.6%) were single. In most cases a person’s marital status determines the level of vulnerability to political and social manipulation especially among the women. Single women parents are more vulnerable to poverty, political abuse and social injustices while those who are married enjoy protection as well as support from their husbands. Moreover, (Kurebwa, 2014) pointed out that, marriage is a source of pride and security for women in Zimbabwe and it creates a sense of companionship as well as social gratification which reduce inferiority complex and enhance social belonging.

Table 2: Marital status of the respondents

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	34	56.6
Single	4	6.6
Divorced	6	10
Widowed	16	26.6
Total	60	100.0

Source primary data (2021)



Source primary data (2021)

Fig 3: Marital status of the respondents

Level of Education

A significant number of respondents never went through formal education. Although some of them went through formal education, only 6 (10%) had primary school education. The other 30 (50%) left school after completing their “O” Levels and only 14 (%) indicated that, they have attained tertiary education. The main reason behind low educational levels was poor family background where parents could not afford the fees, a reason cited by most respondents of the sample. Another reason, given for the low level of education attained by most participants, especially women, was related to societal discrimination based on traditional beliefs. Moreover, the father would claim that he could no longer afford to send a girl child to school because they were not a valuable asset in the family since they would eventually marry and leave home. The patriarchal culture

therefore, promoted gender bias and gave preferential treatment to sons. Others were forced into early marriages so as to provide for their poor families, while a few failed to proceed with their studies because of early pregnancies which affected their academic and social lives. Therefore, most of the respondents dropped out of school because their poor performance in school did not warrant further allocation of limited financial resources. This was the dominant reason for those female vendors who dropped out at primary level. The overall impression that emerged was that parents used this excuse to wriggle out of their responsibility and obligation. It is however, essential to note that level of education has a bearing on one`s reasoning capacity and reasoning is very crucial especially among the youths who are the prime targets of political manipulation and they are often used in political violence activities.

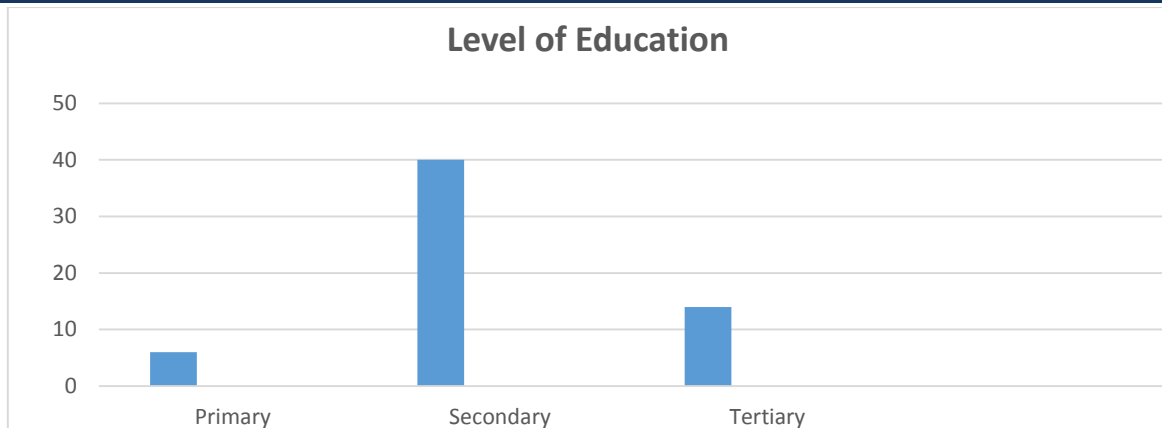


Fig 4: Level of Education
Source primary data (2021)

Causes of Electoral Violence in Mutoko Sanctions

20 (33.3%) of the respondents particularly perpetrators of political violence attributed the causes of electoral violence to sanctions. This was in apparent reference to the punitive measures imposed on former President Mugabe's regime by the (EU) and the US for gross human rights abuses and electoral violence in Zimbabwe through Zimbabwe Democracy Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA). Participants had divergent views on the effects of the sanctions with mostly pro ZANU-PF participants alleging that the sanctions were the cause of the economic meltdown in the country while those pro MDC especially victims of political violence and the civil society organisations were alleging that the economic meltdown was due to the former President's misrule. Moreover, perpetrators of political violence further submitted that the MDC was the one that called for sanctions to be imposed on Zimbabwe. This was calculated to force citizens into unrest in the country, thereby acting as a catalyst for regime change that the EU and the US want to see in Zimbabwe as well as economic meltdown in the country.

Additionally, the following statements from respondents clearly show how sanctions promoted frustration and aggressiveness among the electorate in Mutoko.

Zanu PF has run-down this country. Right now, we do not have our own currency as a country, since the Zimbabwean Dollar was relegated to the dustbin by hyperinflation way back in 2008 after Mugabe stole the election. The United States Dollar (USD) that he has adopted as surrogate currency has disappeared from the country, even the South African Rand. Most private businesses

have closed shop in this country, the government is failing to pay the civil service on time to worsen the scenario, and the recently introduced bond notes have also disappeared.

It is of paramount significance for one to note that, these divergent views of the illegal sanctions as causes of violence in Zimbabwe seem to stem from the parallel ideologies of ZANU-PF and the MDC. The differences in ideologies have caused violent conflicts and confrontations between party members of Zanu PF and MDC. These findings are in contradiction with (Coltart, 2007)'s findings, he attributed much of the political and electoral violence in Zimbabwe to Zanu pf's undemocratic tendencies and its hegemonic beliefs in liberation struggle politics.

Murder of MDC Activists

15 (25%) of the participants noted that, murder of MDC activists necessitated electoral violence in Mutoko South constituency. These findings are largely in chorus with previous researches concerning electoral violence in the country. Studies conducted in this field argue that pre- and post-electoral violence in Zimbabwe resulted in the murder of hundreds of MDC supporters and activists (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Bratton and Masunungure, 2008; Dzimir, *et al.*, 2014; Alexander and Tendi, 2008). The findings of these other studies were also confirmed by this study in MSC, particularly with the views of the victims of political violence, representatives from peace building organisations and traditional leaders. It is also very important to state that although victims of political violence and representatives of peace building organisations were in collusion that the murder of activists and supporters was among the prime causes of pre- and-post-electoral violence in MSC perpetrators were in denial. During focus

group discussions some argued that the murder of opposition supporters happens everywhere in other African countries and Zimbabwe was not exceptional. Moreover, during the focus group discussion in ward 21 one participant remarked,

“The murder of opposition supporters happens in most African countries, Mutoko is not an exception. Elsewhere, the trend has been the same in Burundi, where people are killed almost on a daily basis for opposing Nkurunziza.”

Furthermore, when the research probed further into this issue about the murder of opposition activists as a cause of pre- and post-electoral violence in MSC, it was notable that most victims of the 2008 political violence showed a great sense of insecurity for their own lives and those of their party supporters. They were reluctant to openly talk about their experiences regarding the murder of their fellow activists because it tended to open old wounds that were never healed and also that if they openly shared this information, the very people that murdered their supporters would also do the same to them since they believed that these murders were sponsored by the state.

Militarisation of Elections

40 (66.6. %) of the participants and peace building organisations confirmed that militarisation of elections in Mutoko South has acted as a major driver of electoral violence in the area. Thus, this study concurs with previous studies that assert the militarisation of Zimbabwe elections as a cause of violence include (Masunungure, 2011; Todd, 2007; Murithi and Mawadza, 2011; Muzondidya, 2009). The business community seemed to agree with those that suggested that militarisation of elections in Zimbabwe was the main cause of violence. The participants' varied views are shown by their direct submissions below:

Key military personalities at the time vowed that they would not salute anyone without requisite war credentials. This left the masses disgruntled leading to post electoral violence. Such utterances are believed to have led to the manipulation the votes in favour of the ruling party despite the opposition winning the election, as what happened in the year 2008, which culminated in the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU), even though the former President Mugabe was defeated by Morgan Tsvangirai.

In light of the above findings one can note that, the absolute coercion and force which emanates from the security forces, including the police, prisons,

and the central intelligence organisation as well as the liberation war veterans hand left the electoral processes militarised before and after every poll in Zimbabwe, the security forces are unleashed everywhere so that they intimidate the electorate into voting for the ruling party for fear of an unfavourable outcome. Moreover, military leaders have openly declared that they would never salute anyone without liberation war credentials, even if they were to be elected as president of Zimbabwe as pointed out by (Victor, 2017).

Draconian Pieces of Legislation

23 (38.3%) of the respondents hinted that Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and Public Order and Security Act (POSA) were put in place so as to defeat the activities of the opposition. Draconian legislations were therefore, some of the major causes of the pre- and post-electoral violence in MSC. Participants of this study concurred with (Makonye, *et al.*, 2020) in submitting that, draconian pieces of legislation, POSA and AIPPA were necessary evils that ensured that the opposition MDC and their supporters were kept in constant check so that they would not cause unnecessary anarchy in the country. More so, during key informant interviews with representatives from peace building organisations, one participant highlighted that,

In order to deal with the ever-increasing popularity of the opposition MDC, the former president Mugabe ensured that POSA was promulgated as a law which effectively made it difficult for the opposition to assemble their supporters without being cleared by the police. AIPPA was meant to give a total media black-out on issues of arrests of journalists, murder of activists, and displacement of opposition supporters, among other human rights abuses by the ruling party.

Thus, one can deduce that, contestations and perceived threats from both parties concerning AIPPA and POSA has caused and promoted political violence in Mutoko South Constituency. Therefore, the concurrence of these findings with those of (Tendi, 2014) shows that draconian pieces of legislation are a cause of electoral violence in Mutoko and Zimbabwe at large.

Belief in One Party State

37(61.6%) respondents pointed out that Zanu Pf's belief in one party state has jeopardised elections in Mutoko, anyone who contest against Zanu pf is

declared as an enemy of the liberation struggle. This study concurs with other studies that revealed that ZANU PF has an ambition to have a one-party state in Zimbabwe (Sithole and Makumbe, 1997; Dzimiri, *et al.*, 2014; CCJP and LRF, 1997). Since independence in 1980, former President Mugabe wanted to have a one-party state in Zimbabwe. Focus group discussions and key informant interviews reviewed that, ZANU PF wants to maintain one party state. These views by the respondents are in tandem with (Oscar, 2017) who found out that; ZANU-PF wants to maintain a one-party Marxist state. Former President Mugabe was feared for dealing decisively with parties like

ZAPU, ZUM, among others. To him, the MDC was not an exception and it must be ruthlessly crushed. He also used the liberation war mantra persistently and perpetually to coerce voters, especially those that witnessed the horrors of the liberation war, because they fear war should ZANU-PF lose elections. Therefore, the desire for a one party state by the ruling party emulating the People’s Republic of China means that any opposition political party is more like a thorn in the flesh in as far as look east and economic growth are concerned from the ruling party’s point of view.

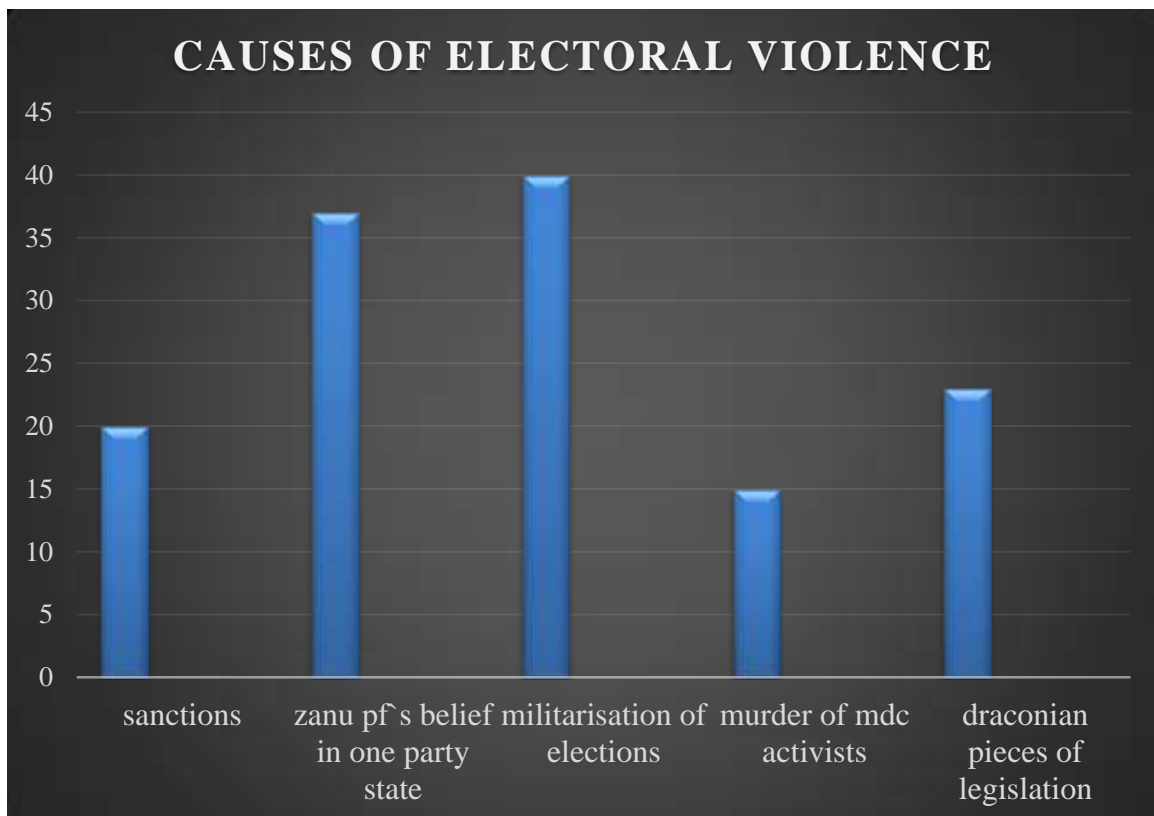


Fig 5: Causes Electoral Violence
source primary data (2021)

Effects of political violence on Ordinary People in Mutoko Unemployment and Creation of Youth Militias

During key informant interview session with representatives from peace building organisations and business owners they highlighted that, political violence manifests as the major socio-political consequence of youth unemployment in Zimbabwe. They have become the fertile ground for recruitment of youth militia by political parties in the country to participate in politically orchestrated violence especially during election times. These findings are imperatively similar to

(Mude, 2014) who noted that youth militia groups and organizations in Zimbabwe are well known for torturing, intimidating and killing those with political views opposed to their respective political parties. Examples are Chipangano in Mbare, Harare and the Al Shabab styled organization in Kwekwe in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe (Mude, 2014). Over the past decade, the country has seen the proliferation of such youth militia organizations who unleash violence on the electorate. Suffice to say that political violence should not be blamed on the youth. Unemployment is what puts them at the messy of

power hungry politicians who incentivize them to participate in political violence. Some respondents remarked that,

Political violence causes the unemployed youth to engage in activities which are very brutal against community elders as a way of trying to please their political masters especially during election times.

It is however important to note that political violence has negative effects to community development and cohesion since the youth will be used by politicians to achieve their political goals. Violence in Zimbabwe pre-exists the onset of British colonialism, notwithstanding that it was also through violent means. Prior to colonialism, the political landscape in Zimbabwe was initiated by contestations and fighting between tribes and civilizations that existed in the geography of present-day Zimbabwe (Nyere, 2016). Political independence in Zimbabwe was consummated by violent means together with guerrilla warfare. Governance in post-colonial Zimbabwe has been, by and large, enforced through violence and the threat of violence. This trend arguably continues to date. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2010: 281-295, 2013: 168) and Sadomba (2011: 229) counted some politically turbulent and violent episodes in the history of Zimbabwe as follows: First Chimurenga (1896-1897), Second Chimurenga (1965-1980), Operation Chipo Chiroorwa (2007), Operation Gukurahundi (1983-1984), Hondo Yeminda (2000), Operation Murambatsvina (2005), and Operation Mavhotera Papi (2008). Most recently, of the violent episodes in Zimbabwe, is the crackdown on street vendors in 2015 (News Day, 2015).

Furthermore, one can almost observe a trend that in post-colonial Zimbabwe, there has never been a decade of peace where the government or the state has not emitted violence on innocent and unarmed citizens. There is a visible and clear pattern of violent contests in the state systems that have been used in Zimbabwe over the years, particularly over political power. Hence, the findings advanced by this research agrees with (Banyera and Nyere, 2015) that articulated a chronicled and series of political violence on citizens by the state and ZANU PF has negative effects to the ordinary people and human rights have been grossly compromised by the acts of political violence in Zimbabwe. The findings of this research and previous studies which have been conducted before demonstrated that violence in Zimbabwe predates colonialism. It has always been a part of

statecraft in the various cultural forms and civilizations that inhabited present-day Zimbabwe. Therefore, while it can be argued that political violence is detrimental to the lives of ordinary people in Zimbabwe particularly in Mutoko, violence has been endemic to Zimbabwe and was used as a political tool in Zimbabwe prior to the British settlers' arrival.

Forced Displacement and Gender Based Violence

25(41.6%) participants indicated that political violence leads to forced displacements of families in Mutoko South Constituency and many women and children were abused during the 2008 presidential election re run. These effects of political violence are very damaging to psychosocial well-being of victimised people. During focus group discussions some female participants narrated that,

Our daughters were forced to attend political bases by district political chairpersons. It really affected us as parents and our children, but we could do nothing out of it but our children were infected with HIV and other related sexually transmitted infections during the 2008 presidential re run.

From the above findings, one can draw similarities with (Bayera and Nyere, 2015), in their study they have realised that, there is a continued history of gender-based violence and political violence against women in elections. Gendered repression and electoral violence have been perpetrated against women in Zimbabwe for decades. The aftermath of 2008 elections was one of the most notable peaks in political violence in the last 10 years. Women were raped and forced into concubine as a means of punishing them or their spouses for participating in politics (Banyera and Nyere, 2015). Testimonies of survivors revealed numerous cases of rape, gang rape, torture and intentional transmission of HIV.

Community Polarisation

During focus group discussions respondents 20 (33.3%) highlighted that, political violence necessitates confusion and community polarisation. Differences in political affiliations are regarded as declarations of enmity and war against each other. This as a result has divided communities to a great magnitude. These effects of politically motivated violence need to be addressed so as to ensure proper and equitable functioning of

the community in Mutoko South Constituency. Some respondents narrated that,

Being associated with opposition politics is a taboo in Mutoko South Constituency people will find ways of harassing you politically. You will not be able to receive relief food from donors.

In view of the above findings, one can note that, political violence created polarised versions of reality whereby pro state or ZANU PF people attributed election violence to the opposition MDC, while those who are pro opposition blamed the ruling ZANU-PF and the state for violence in the community. Moreover, given the polarised state of Mutoko South Constituency communities during electoral contests, it is not possible that only one party was responsible for all election violence. As (Sachikonye, 2011: 31) observes, both the ruling party and the opposition perpetrated political violence, although their culpability may not have been the same.

Extreme Mental, Emotional and Physical Harm to Individuals

30 (50%) Respondents indicated that, those who choose to support the opposition 2008 were at risk of political violence such as harassment, sexual assault, physical assault, intimidation, physical and emotional torture, and malicious injury to property, abduction and arson. However, some of the victims shy away from participating since they consider themselves as defenceless and highly vulnerable. Although there was no conclusive evidence on political violence directly applied on the majority of 2008 political violence victims it was however noted through other data sources that they were indiscriminately affected by political violence. Political violence induced disabilities could neither be confirmed nor denied for fear of reprisal. This shows that, the prevalence of disabilities as a result of political violence cannot be ruled out in Mutoko South Constituency, although there is no conclusive evidence. The above findings concur with (Sachikonye, 2011) he postulated that, 2008 presidential runoff elections left people in rural areas extremely traumatised by political violence which was associated with sexual harassment, abuse and torture.

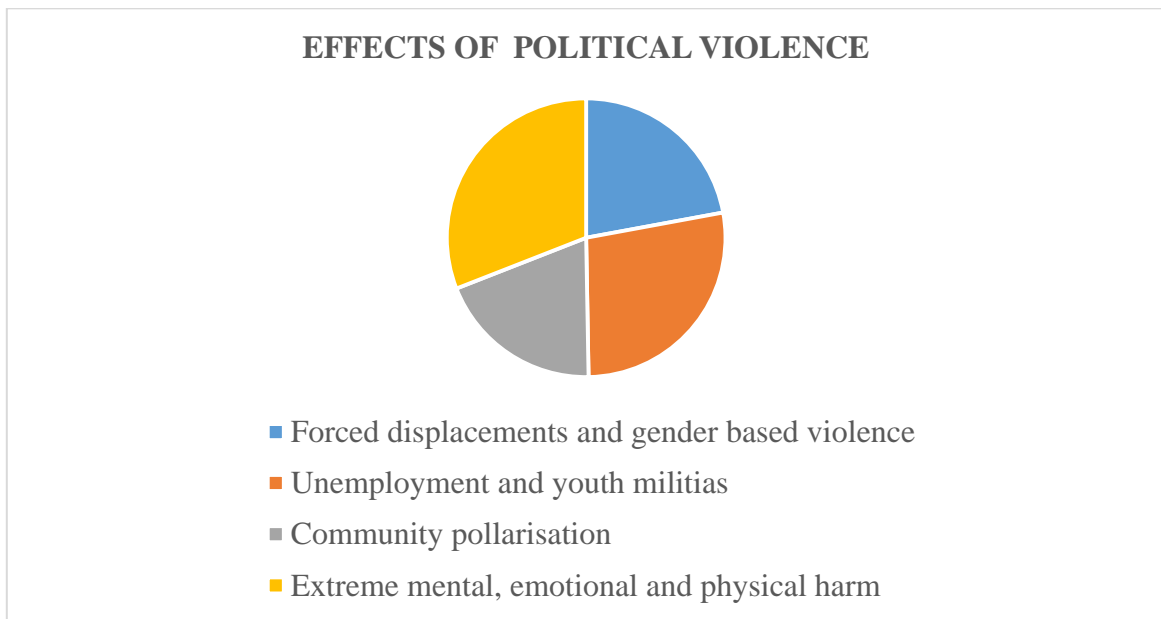


Fig 6; Effects of political Violence
Source primary data (2021)

Link between 2008 Presidential Runoff and Traumatic Experiences among Some Members of Mutoko South Constituency?

Most of the respondents highlighted that there is a link between political violence which was perpetuated during the 2008 presidential run off and traumatic experiences being witnessed in Mutoko. For instance, during focus group

discussions some of the respondents had this to say,

Some youths were being used by ZANU PF to destroy properties, abduct, assault and allegedly kill MDC supporters and some of these youths are currently facing some mental challenges. I have a nephew who was sixteen years of age during the 2008, she was taken by the ZANU PF and was raped several times and currently she is highly

traumatised to such an extent that she has a phobia whenever she sees all males and she is living positive.

The above findings clearly show the link between political violence in 2008 presidential run off and traumatic experiences in Mutoko South Constituency it is however, important to ensure and implement peacebuilding through psychosocial healing drawing from (Lederach 1997) `s conflict intervention and peace building pyramid. In addressing these traumatic experiences holistic approach must be used because it helps in building comprehensive cultural and spiritual healing especially among the victims of the political violence in Mutoko.

Moreover, during key informant interviews with traditional leaders of the area, they highlighted that traumatic experiences faced by many youths and the elderly who have been tortured through the famous `long sleeve or short sleeve` political violence mantra must be healed spiritually and rituals must be done to comfort the avenging spirits and the lost blood. These submissions by traditional leaders indicate the level of trauma which has been necessitated by the 2008 presidential run off. Hence the connection between the latter and the former in Mutoko cannot be disputed as evidenced by this research`s findings. It is also essential to note that, representatives of peace building organisations in the area concurred with traditional leaders on the issue of trauma within the post conflict community of Mutoko. The commissioner from National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) weighed in and pointed out that, traumatised victims in Mutoko are still having torrid times to date and there is a need to come up with mechanisms such as counselling and psychosocial support initiatives to the affected and bereaved families in the area. The local church pastor also suggested that, there is a need to pray for heavenly healing and consolation by the powers above to those who have been and who are being traumatised by the 2008 presidential run off atrocities. The extreme conditions nevertheless suggest that the revitalization of Mutoko`s community will require many elements typically associated with a strategy for post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation and healing as noted by (Gultang 1995). The main impetus for recovery will of course have to come from peace building through psychosocial healing in Mutoko.

The net effect of traumatic vulnerabilities has been a high prevalence of mental and stress-related illnesses including many chronic cases which continue to threaten the ability of many people to cope with everyday problems (Machakanja, 2010). As children grow up with chronically ill or mentally stressed parents, they are far more likely to become depressed and abusive themselves, creating vicious cycles with consequent social implications. Until now, ordinary Zimbabweans have relied on their instinct for survival as a means of healing. But many of these problems have undoubtedly been aggravated by the glaring lack of a comprehensive approach, not only to the provision of adequate treatment services or facilities, but also to the acknowledgement of the magnitude of the problem. In her findings about the link between trauma and political violence (Machakanja, 2010) further revealed that, the hatred, fear, prejudice and racism engrained in people`s lives by hostilities of the violent political conflict means that its transformation must be rooted in social-psychological and spiritual dimensions of healing. Deducing from the aforementioned, one can note that, critical dimension in recovering and healing from crisis is coming to terms with the past and seeking accountability for past crimes and abuses. Presumably, any such effort would not only cover 2008 presidential run off violence, but also other forms of violence which have been experienced in Mutoko district.

Drawing from Machakanja (2010) `s findings regarding the link between trauma and 2008 presidential run off and the efficacy of implementing peace building through psychosocial healing, she noted that, the biggest challenge however, for any healing process, is that unless the problem is acknowledged by the ruling elites, Zimbabweans will continue to deal with the mental effects of the political violence in an ad hoc and unsustainable fashion (Machakanja 2010:10). As such, the work being done by some public and private health sector organisations and emergent psychiatric and counselling units in promoting justice, psychological relief and reconciliation, represents an important step in facing up to the challenges of a traumatic past, albeit challenging and costly.

Approaches to Psychosocial Healing to Peacebuilding in Mutoko

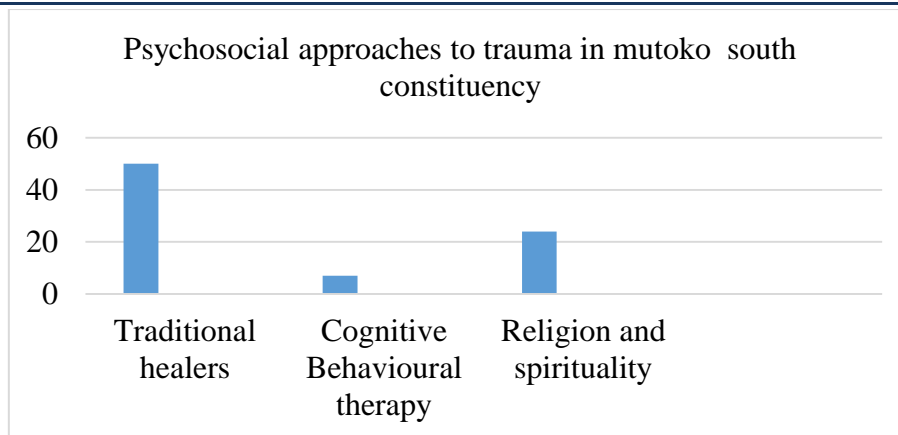


Fig 7: psychosocial approaches to trauma in mutoko south constituency
Source primary data (2021)

CONCLUSION

The research findings indicated that electoral violence in Mutoko can be a by-product of many factors. These factors include militarisation of elections, belief in one party state, draconian pieces of legislation, murder of MDC activists and sanctions. These findings are in concurrence with Makonye, *et al.*, (2020) 's findings when they highlighted that illegal sanctions have been used and manipulated as a way of dividing communities politically thereby enhancing spirit of hatred which automatically degenerate into a culture of violence during the times of elections in Zimbabwe. In light of the above, one can deduce that victims in Mutoko have not been spared from these causes of electoral violence. Nevertheless, the above findings contradict with previous studies concerning the causes of electoral violence. Previous researchers concluded that, while analysing the dynamics of pre- and post-electoral violence in Zimbabwe, the findings of previous studies submitted that ZANU PF leaders uses war rhetoric and narratives to coerce voters were confirmed (Raftopoulos and Alexander, 2006; Muzondidya, 2010; Matlosa, 2011; Makumbe, 2009). Makonye, *et al.*, (2020) 's study confirmed that whenever elections are impending, it has become routine for Mugabe to remind the electorate that Zimbabwe's independence came through the shedding of blood and that a repeat of this could reoccur should voters vote against him and ZANU-PF. The above contradictions might be due to dynamic changes which often happen time and again in the game of politics.

Furthermore, the research findings highlighted that, there are many negative effects which has been caused by political violence in Mutoko these included forced displacements and gender based violence, polarisation of communities,

unemployment and creation of youth militias as well as extreme physical, emotional and mental harm to individuals. These findings show that political violence is very detrimental to societal well-being, development and good governance in general. Though the communities of Mutoko have been traumatised by the 2008 presidential election runoff, they are still hopeful that psychosocial methods can be used to ensure peace building within the communities. They suggested psychosocial methods such as pre-educational interventions, cognitive behavioural therapy, the use of traditional healers (mhondoro) to conduct rituals as a way of avenging the spirits and consoling the lost blood. This study concludes that, some of the psychosocial healing methods which were suggested by respondents can be very effective since they are holistic and culturally or anthropologically grounded within the local communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that peace building through psychosocial healing should be done by the National Peace and reconciliation commission and peace building organisations without annihilating traditional leaders. The proposed recommendations below, if adopted along with political will and determination, will help in peace building, reconciliation and healing of the victims of 2008 political violence.

Raising Awareness and Changing Perceptions in Mutoko

The mass media can be used to make constituencies aware of their contribution to local peace building and to expose political violence in Mutoko South. Furthermore, media work is also important to combat negative stereotypes. National institutions in many countries implement broad-

based public information campaigns to reduce political violence. Mass media and the formal peace education system are powerful means for conveying and transforming the values affirmed by a society. Their influence has so far been under-utilised in advocating for psychosocial healing in Mutoko South constituency.

Peace Education and Peace Committees

The post conflict communities of Mutoko South Constituency have been traumatised by 2008 political violence. It is therefore, pertinent for Civil Society Organisations to come up with mechanisms and workshops which promote peace education and demobilise people from violent minds which are currently bedevilling people and families in Mutoko. Furthermore, peace education workshops must be coupled with peace committees which will then act as bridges between the previously conflicting parties. It is however, important to ensure that, these peace committees accommodate everybody including traditional leaders and the victims.

Political Tolerance, Democracy and Respect of Human Rights

An alternative framework of politics is needed in Zimbabwe, one that does not seek to dominate or obliterate other forms of political arrangements, difference, dissimilarity, contrast in political ideologies must be sanitised and ensure respect of the constitution and rule of law. Paving way of these and other principles of democracy will help to reduce political violence in Zimbabwe. Respect of human respect will deter the perpetrators and as such peace education and peacebuilding will then yield dividends than trying to implement the same within polarised and divided communities of Mutoko South Constituency.

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