
NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF PHYSICAL ABUSE OF ELDER PEOPLE ON THE PERPETRATORS – EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM ZAMBIA¹

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Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to explore the negative consequences of physical abuse of elder people on the perpetrators by using the perceptions and conceptions of community leaders in rural and urban Zambia. On the basis of the qualitative research with community leaders involved in addressing the problem of elder abuse in Zambia, it is evident that physical abuse of elder people has serious negative consequences on perpetrators. These include arrests, fine, imprisonment, stigma, leaving the community and negative psychological effects such as fear. Since social gerontologists, social workers and public health workers are among the main frontline workers in addressing the problem of elder abuse, this article argues that these revelations have serious implications on social gerontology, social work and public health education, practice and research as well as on future research with regard to the global phenomenon of physical abuse of elder people. This is because the revelations made in this article suggest new ways of thinking about the problem of physical abuse of elder people. Thus the main field of application of this article is social gerontology, social work and public health.*

Keywords: *Physical abuse of elder people; negative consequences; perpetrators; Zambia*

Introduction

Elder abuse is a global problem with multiple perpetrators which include family and none-family members (World Report on Violence and Health, 2002; Jackson, 2014;

¹ NOTE: There is no potential conflict of interest regarding this manuscript. However, the materials used in this article are part of my own going PhD thesis. Part of the materials have also already appeared in my other articles published in Journal of Community Positive Practices, XIV(2), 2014 and Journal of Postmodernism Problems, Vol.5, No.1 and Vol.5, No.3, 2015. In addition, for the sake of protecting the identity of the research participants, I have replaced the actual names of the participants with aliases.

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Kabelenga, 2014; Phelan, 2015; World Report on Ageing and Health, 2015). This means that many incidences of elder abuse involve at least two parties – the abused elder person and the perpetrators of the abuse (Kabelenga, 2015a; Kabelenga, 2015b). Notwithstanding this, there is a very surprising thing in the existing literature on the negative consequences of elder abuse. That is, there is very little information (to the best of my knowledge) that shows the negative consequences of elder abuse on the perpetrators of elder abuse. Negative consequences of elder abuse have always been talked about with bias to the abused elder person. These include psychological problems such as depression, emotional problems such as loss of trust and social support, physical injuries, restrictions on and elimination of autonomy, increased institutionalization, imposition of a guardianship, loss of assets, increased hospitalization and mortality. In a nutshell, it means that the negative consequences of elder abuse lead to a diminished quality of life for abused older adults (Hudson, 1991; Wolf, 2000; World Report on Violence and Health, 2002; Dong, Simon and Gorbien, 2007; Iborra, 2008; HelpAge International, 2011; Anetzberger, 2012; Phelan, 2013; World Report on Ageing and Health, 2015). With regard to the perpetrators, the only negative consequence talked about and also in brief is facing the law (World Report on Violence and Health, 2002; National Center on Elder Abuse Administration on Ageing, 2014).

The above grave gap in the existing literature has provided the picture which shows that when elder abuse takes place, it is only the abused elder person that feels the negative effects of the abuse and the perpetrators do not experience any negative consequences. In my own thinking this is a very misleading picture. Some readers of the available literature on elder abuse who are not able to think outside box are also misled into thinking that the negative consequences of elder abuse are only felt by the abused elder people. In the same vein the potential perpetrators of elder abuse are made to think that even if they abuse an elder person, they will not experience any negative consequences as all the existing literature on elder abuse have shown shown that the negative consequences of elder abuse are felt only by the abused elder people and not the perpetrators.

Thus, the aim of this article is to fill up the above gap in the existing literature. I focus specifically on the negative consequences of physical abuse of elder people on the perpetrators in rural and urban Zambia. I hope this will broaden thinking about elder abuse and spark public debates which are essential in the fight against elder abuse.

Definitions of elder abuse

There is no universally agreed upon definition of elder abuse. This is because elder abuse is socially constructed which means different meanings to different people across the world (WHO, 2002; Phelan, 2013; Kabelenga, 2014). According to Wolf (2000) elder abuse is a term with broad meaning, including many forms and examples, always describing harm or loss to an older person. Payne (2005, p. 2) argues that ‘the term elder abuse captures virtually any possible harm inflicted on an older person by society, care setting, or individual. WHO has also defined the concept of elder abuse. This buzz organization defines elder abuse as a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action

occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or stress to an older person (WHO, 2012, p.1).

When I critically look at the above definitions, there are two important things which I am able to see. First, I can see that elder abuse takes in many forms. Second, I can see that the common denominator of all these definitions is that elder abuse is an act that hurts or painfully disturb the life of an elder person (Kabelenga, 2014; Kabelenga, 2015). In this article, the terms elder person and elder abuse are defined according to the way the study participants conceptualized them. This is because the main part of this article is written on the basis of the empirical evidence on elder abuse in Zambia. Participants defined an elder person as any person in their 50s and above or those with gray hair. On the other hand, elder abuse was used to refer to any intentional acts that involved hurting or painfully disturbing the life of any person who was in their 50s and above and/or who had gray hair. The above conceptions by the participants underscore the earlier arguments that the terms ‘elder person’ and ‘elder abuse’ are social constructs (WHO, 2002; Phelan, 2013; Kabelenga, 2014). For example, in Western societies, the onset of older age is usually considered to coincide with the age of retirement, at 60 or 65 years of age (World Report on Ageing and Health, 2015). Another old age definition that is increasingly becoming popular is that provided by the UN. The UN agreed cutoff is 60+ years to refer to the elder population (WHO, 2012; HelpAge International, 2015). Thus, when these definitions are reflected upon in connection with how the participants in Zambia conceptualized an elder person, it can be argued that what might be relevant in one context might not be relevant in another context (Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 2007; Gray and Webb, 2013; Kabelenga, 2014; Kabelenga, 2015). As can be seen, the conceptions held by the western countries and the UN about an elder person seems not to be relevant to the participants who participated in my study. Thus, the criteria commonly used in western countries and by the UN to construct an elder person are not used in this article. Rather what has been used is the criterion provided by the study participants in Zambia. This reflected reality of an elder person in Zambia from the participants’ perceptions and conceptions at that time of the study.

Review of available literature on negative consequences of elder abuse on the abused elder people and the perpetrators

In international literature, a typology that has similarly gained ground in the study of abuse of elder persons identifies five categories of abuse that elder people suffer. These are physical abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse and material abuse (Wolf, 2000; HelpAge International, 2011; Kabelenga, 2014; Kabelenga, 2015; World Report on Ageing and Health, 2015). In this article, the focus is on physical abuse of elder people. Physical abuse refers to the acts that cause physical harm to the body of an elder person. Examples of this type of abuse include use of restraints for instance, tie somebody to a bed by using ropes or chains or by other physical and medical means, slapping, shoving, beating, hitting, pushing, burning, kicking, throwing out of a house, not keeping the elder person safe from danger or injury, intentionally not removing danger and admissions for overdoses of prescribed

medication among others (Ibid; Cohen, 2007). Besides the negative consequences of physical abuse on the abused elder person mentioned in introduction, Bavel, Janssens, Schakenraad and Thurlings (2010) bring out the following to be additional negative consequences of physical abuse on the abused elder people: physical pain, bruises, withdrawal, sudden incontinence, lack of appetite, black eyes and anxiety.

To the contrary, there is scanty information regarding the negative consequences on the perpetrators of physical abuse. Thorough searches of on-line and hard copy literature both published and grey [at least to the best of my abilities] do not bring out detailed information about the negative consequences of physical abuse on the perpetrators. For example, Heisler (2000) and National Center on Elder Abuse Administration on Ageing (2014) notes that most states in the United States have penalties for those who victimize older adults. However, they have not provided any detailed information about how many perpetrators have been prosecuted and convicted for physical abuse of elder people. Perhaps scarcity of information on the negative consequences of elder abuse on the perpetrators indicates that previous studies have not paid attention to this sphere of elder abuse. Thus, this article aims to fill-up this void in the existing literature.

Objective

The specific objective of this article is to explore the negative consequences of physical abuse of elder people on the perpetrators by using the perceptions and conceptions of community leaders in rural and urban Zambia. In this article, the word community is used to denote a group of people living together in one geographical area, and thus they understand their local environment better (Osei-Hwedie, Mwansa and Katembula, 1990; Kamwengo, 2004). On the other hand, community leaders referred to include ward councilors, chief's representatives, village headmen, youths and women leaders, church (religious) leaders, the police, court judges, community crime prevention units (CCPUs), area development community members, public health workers, elder people's representatives and social workers among others.

Methodology

Material and methods

To achieve the above objective, a qualitative approach that included focus group discussions (FGDs) and one-on-one interviews with 31 community leaders [19 from rural Zambia and 12 from urban Zambia] who were purposively selected were conducted. This disparity in the number of participants was because they were more participants in rural Zambia who were readily available to participate in the study than those in urban Zambia. This approach allowed detailed and richer information about the negative consequences of physical abuse on the perpetrators to be captured using the voices of the people who had first hand information about elder abuse in their local communities (Creswell, 2007; Mason, 2013; Kabelenga, 2014; Kabelenga, 2015). I conducted 36 interviews [22 in rural Zambia and 14 in urban Zambia]. The number of interviews conducted surpassed the number of participants (31) who participated in the

study because some of the interviews were follow-up interviews with the same participants. On average each interview lasted between one hour and three hours. I conducted all the interviews myself because I wanted to make sure that I collect all the information that I needed to know about the negative consequences of physical abuse on the perpetrators in rural and urban Zambia.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed manually after transcribing all the 36 interviews using the qualitative data transcribing software called Express Scribe Transcription. I first read each of the 36 transcripts several times to get a sense of the data in its entirety. During initial reading of the transcripts, open coding procedures were employed, where codes were created from what was present in the data (Pope, Loeffler and Ferrell, 2014). After identifying initial codes in the transcripts, I moved to focused coding. This involved making decisions about what codes were most relevant to the research objective, discarding codes that were not relevant, and combining earlier codes that were similar. Constant comparison was used to look for similarities and differences in categories across the transcripts. Thus, the whole process was a back and forth process and as such it was very stressful (Creswell, 2007; Kabelenga, 2014; Kabelenga, 2015).

Confidentiality

Because the participants were assured that their names would not be revealed anywhere, I have not mentioned the actual communities where the study took place. The names of the participants have also been changed with aliases. However, I have maintained the actual verbatim transcripts from the interviews.

Findings and discussions

Demographic characteristics of the participants

The participants were aged between 27 and 72 years. Of the total 31 informants, 23 were males and 8 were females. Of the 23 males, 16 were from rural Zambia and 7 were from urban Zambia. With regard to 8 females, 5 were from urban Zambia and 3 were from rural Zambia. In terms of educational attainments, 1 participant had primary school education, 3 had gone up to high school level, 18 had college [vocational] education and 9 were university graduates [maximum of masters degree]. In addition, all the participants had participated in addressing elder abuse in their communities. There were more males than females who participated in the study because the majority of the community leaders in Zambia who are involved in addressing elder abuse are men.

Evidence of physical abuse of elder people in rural and urban Zambia

In both rural and urban Zambia, participants acknowledged having witnessed incidences of physical abuse of elder people. By physical abuse, informants meant intentional acts that caused physical harm to the bodies of elder persons. In acknowledging the existence of physical abuse, participants cited specific examples in which physical abuse manifested in their communities. These included beating, setting ablaze and killing of elder persons. Some participants' remarks on physical abuse of elder people in their communities were as follows:

"I would really say that it happens on the daily basis. Yes. In fact it is a pity that I didn't look up the old newspapers but every now and then you do see a story in press of an elderly person who has been assaulted because they are suspected of being sorcerers. If they are just assaulted they are very lucky because sometime they actually get killed. Yes." (Grandmum aged 72 years – Urban Zambia).

"Some have been beaten to death, as a hospital we have received some that have been brought in dead, and some come in badly injured so we take care of them. We do receive such cases. Yes." (FGD. 5 – Rural Zambia).

The above result raises serious implications on the severity of the impacts of physical abuse of elder persons in rural and urban Zambia. It seems that from the participants' perceptions and conceptions physical abuse is the extreme form of elder abuse as it can result not only in body injuries of an elder person but also in instant loss of lives of some elder persons. This finding is also similar with results on physical abuse established by other researchers from other countries such as Baker (1975); Burston, (1975); Pillemer and Wolf (1986); Wolf (2000); WHO (2002); Iborra, (2008); HelpAge International, (2011); and Anetzberger (2012). This means that regardless of the differences in social contexts, similar types of elder abuse may produce similar negative consequences on the abused elder persons.

Negative consequences of physical abuse on the perpetrators

In light of the above revelations, I asked the participants this question: what are the negative consequences of physical abuse of elder people on the perpetrators? Interesting findings of this study is that physical abuse of elder people had serious negative consequences on the perpetrators. From the participants' perceptions and conceptions, common negative consequences on the perpetrators included arrests, fine and imprisonment; stigma; and leaving the community. Details on each of these consequences are provided below:

Arrests, fine and imprisonment

The participants revealed that once physical abuse cases were reported to the law enforcement agencies such as the police, Zambian courts of law, village courts and CCPUs, the perpetrators of elder abuse were arrested, fined and imprisoned. That was

because elder abuse in Zambia was criminal offence. Typical stories on how the perpetrators were hard hit by the Zambian criminal laws were as follows:

“The chaps who abused the older man to death were rounded up when the doctor wrote causes of death as having been bodily injuries causing death, bodily injuries, assault, and so on. Those chaps were rounded up by the police and they served sentences.” (FGD.1 – Rural Zambia).

“The negative effects, some have been jailed. The time I have stayed in this community, statistics, maybe I would say two to three have been jailed. They have been jailed I remember for ten, thirty years or something like that. Somewhere there.” (Brian in his 40s – Rural Zambia).

“The consequences which fall on such types of culprits are that the law takes its course. Once they are brought before book, such people are convicted, because the law will take its course. Already they have broken the law and the due process has to done. And many of those have ended up getting convicted either through a fine or even others even custodial sentence. They are serving. We have a quite a number of people that are already in prison. Those that may have failed to pay a fine if fined by subordinate court. I will talk of cases that are currently around. We have two people that have been convicted and three of them are serving a nine months jail sentence with simple imprisonment and another set was also sentenced to another nine months just within here.” (Wynter in his 50s – Rural Zambia).

“They arrested the sister who abused the brother. Yes we were told so by the police. And since then she was released I think on bail or bond, and then the police would be better placed to determine what type of justice.” (Eunice aged 34 – Urban Zambia).

“There are so many incidences of jails.” (David in his 50s – Urban Zambia).

The above result implies that from the participants’ perceptions and conceptions, physical abuse in their communities and throughout Zambia was criminal offence liable to fine and imprisonment or both upon conviction by the courts of the law. Thus, from the participants’ perspectives if anyone in their communities thought that if they abused the elder person they would go scot free, they would not provided they would be brought before the law enforcement agencies. Interestingly, through this study some participants especially from law enforcement agencies even appealed to the elder people and the general public in Zambia to report any form of abuse against elder people especially to the magistrate courts where the penalties for elder abuse on the perpetrators were heavy: *“I will actually advise older people and the public through you to report those cases to us. For the perpetrators to receive heavy punishment, I encourage older people to be taking those cases to magistrate court and not local court. Because at magistrate courts, the punishment is heavy and perpetrators feel the effects for their actions.” (Court judge in his 40s).* Participants cited the Zambia Witchcraft Chapter 90, Defamation Act of 1964; Criminal Procedure Code Act of 1973 and Moral Justice Act of 1996 as some of the legal acts that backed arrests, fine and imprisonment of the perpetrators of elder abuse in their communities and the whole Zambia.

The above result implies that from the participants’ perceptions and conceptions, the legal consequences suffered by the perpetrators of physical abuse of elder people in their communities were in line with the Zambia national legal frameworks on violation of human rights. This means that participants perceived physical abuse of elder people in their communities as violation of elder people’s rights. Thus, the result is in line with

the on-going global discourses on elder abuse. In international human rights discourses, elder abuse is seen as violation of elder people's human rights (World Report on Violence and Health, 2002; Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002; HelpAge International, 2011; Phelan, 2013; World Report on Ageing and Health, 2015). The result also agrees with Heisler (2000) and National Center on Elder Abuse Administration on Ageing (2014) arguments that elder abuse is criminal offence in many states.

Stigma

Almost all participants disclosed that the perpetrators of physical abuse suffered serious stigma from other community members who did not support abuse of elder people. For example, because of their barbaric actions, other community members did not want to interact with the perpetrators as they were seen to be evil people not worthy to associate with. When describing the stigma associated with physical abuse of elder people, some informants described the perpetrators as 'black sheep' because everyone in the community recognized them as community savages. Representative expressions of the participants on this consequence were as follows:

"They are feared in the community. People are not free with them. Because even when they say who carried it? – to mention him (laughs informants), and they learn you the one who (laughs informants). You can't even do it. Its, we can say, fear, you respect out fear. It's not a well meant respect. Its respect that comes out of fear. I don't know how you call that kind of respect that which comes out of fear, not because the person is just to be respected. There is respect that has savage character, burry, you know. Those are the black sheep." (FGD.1 – Rural Zambia).

"The negative effect is that they will walk along with their stigma; they will be guilt for the rest of their lives. And so, already that can have a telling psychological impact on the perpetrator. It is like you are an enemy to yourself." (Father Isaiah aged 64 – Urban Zambia).

A critical reflection upon the above result implies that from the participants' perceptions and conceptions, perpetrators of physical abuse of elder people in their communities had ended up destroying their own community images, characters and conscious. It is seems that from the informants' perspectives stigma was a short-term and long-term negative consequence of abusing an elder person on the perpetrators. The result seems also to suggest that from the participants' perceptions and conceptions, physical abuse of elder people resulted into isolation of the perpetrators from the mainstream society. It also resulted into negative psychological impacts such as guilty and fear on the perpetrators. When these results are linked to the negative consequences of physical abuse on the abused elder people, it can be seen that they are similar with the negative consequences on the perpetrators. In the above literature on the consequences of physical abuse on the abused elder person, stigma, and isolation and negative psychological effects like fear have been brought out (Hudson, 1991; Wolf, 2000; World Report on Violence and Health, 2002; Dong, Simon and Gorbien, 2007; Iborra, 2008; HelpAge International, 2011; Anetzberger, 2012; Phelan, 2013; Draft Zambia National Ageing Policy, 2013; World Report on Ageing and Health, 2015). The same consequences were brought out by the participants to be the negative consequences on the perpetrators in their communities. Thus, this is a very interesting

finding, because it suggests that both the abused and the perpetrators of physical abuse in rural and urban Zambia suffered the similar negative consequences. Perhaps, the finding means that perpetrators of physical abuse in rural and urban Zambia did not know that even they would suffer negative consequences for the physical abuse of elder people.

Leaving the community

Of great interest also was that the material gathered in this study revealed that some of the perpetrators of elder abuse ended up leaving the community after abusing the elder people. That was because they feared police arrests and vengeance from other community members. Others were deported from the community by the community leaders. From the participants' perceptions and conceptions, that was because it was against community norms and values in Zambia to abuse elder people and the perpetrators of elder abuse were perceived by the community leaders to be dangerous to the whole community. Thus, in order to discourage community members from violation of community norms and values, perpetrators were sometimes forced by community leaders to leave the community. Participants' testified of what they had seen for themselves as follows:

"In this community, the number is big those that are on the run, they are also many. They fear to be arrested, because of the law that is coming in. You remember we started by saying that this law came with the white man and us as Africans, after independence we have not looked at this law, but we are changing these other laws, but with this one we have not changed it. So once they find themselves in such a situation, they remember this law, they say, if this law visits you, the end result is being into prison, they run away." **(Moffat aged 61 – Rural Zambia).**

"Sometimes the perpetrator and his family are made to leave the area. Even the family can be made to leave the area. Exactly. At times you find that that family is guilty of looking at whatever they went through." **(Brian in his 40s – Rural Zambia).**

"You find this character would look for another village somewhere else, would relocate." **(Father Isaiah aged 64 – Urban Zambia).**

"Some even relocate. In fact both the abused and the abuser relocate and the whole community suffer" **(Lainess aged 67 – Urban Zambia).**

It is also increasing the number of the people roaming the streets because they killed a person." **(David in his 50s – Urban Zambia).**

By reflecting carefully on the above result, it implies that from the participants' perceptions and conceptions, the negative consequences of physical abuse of elder people in their communities backfired to the perpetrators. From the above testimonies, the result also implies that some perpetrators of physical abuse of elder people in rural and urban Zambia had ended up disturbing their own lives. That was because some of them ended up becoming vagabonds to avoid facing wrath of the law or community dissociation. This result entails also that from the participants' perceptions and conceptions, the above negative consequence should be seen to emanate from the

Zambia national laws and community norms and values that regulate criminal behavior such as physical abuse of elder people.

The above all are the negative consequences of physical abuse of elder people on the perpetrators in rural and urban Zambia from the perceptions and conceptions of the participants.

Conclusions

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following are the conclusions:

To begin with, from the perceptions and conceptions of the participants the negative consequences of physical abuse in rural and urban Zambia do not only affect the abused elder persons. It also negatively affects the perpetrators. From the participants' revelations, the main ways in which the perpetrators are negatively affected in their communities include arrests, fine and imprisonments, stigma, leaving the community, destruction of family and community relationships and negative psychological effects such as fear and guilty.

Arriving from the above, it can also be concluded that from the participants' perceptions and conceptions physical abuse of elder people results in deterioration of the quality of life of the perpetrators and their families. This is evident in that once physical abuse cases are reported to law enforcement agencies, perpetrators get arrested, fined or imprisoned. If they don't, most of them run away from their communities for fear of suffering wrath of the law or community vengeance. Some of them become vagabonds. This means that physical abuse of elder people make the perpetrators in rural and urban Zambia to become restless. When these negative consequences arise, the perpetrators' family members also suffer. For example, the family may lose their family member through imprisonment or the family is also made to leave the community by the community leaders. Thus, it can be concluded that the negative consequences of physical abuses on the perpetrators are huge and have short term and long term negative consequences.

Interesting conclusions that arise from the results is that some of negative consequences of physical abuse on the perpetrators and the abused elder persons are the same. This is evident in that from the participants' revelations, the perpetrators of physical abuse in rural and urban Zambia suffered stigma, isolation and negative psychological effects such as fear and guilty. Using the available literature both in Zambia and outside Zambia, these are the same negative consequences that the abused elder persons suffer (see Wolf, 2000; World Report on Violence and Health, 2002; and Mupila, 2008; Draft Zambia National Ageing Policy, 2013).

It can also be concluded that from the participants' perceptions and conceptions, the above negative consequences on the perpetrators have come about because law enforcement agencies and community leaders in Zambia have come out strongly in punishing the perpetrators of physical abuse of the elder people. Thus, if they were no actual implementation of the Zambian criminal laws and community norms and values

that regulate criminal behavior such as physical abuse of elder people, perpetrators of physical abuse in Zambia would not have suffered much negative consequences.

Limitations

This article has two limitations. First, the article is written on the basis of the qualitative data collected from 31 participants in Zambia. It should be noted that one of the main central aims of any qualitative research inquiry is to provide in-depth information about a particular phenomenon (Pope et al., 2014). Therefore, the revelations made in this article should be cautiously applied to other parts of Zambia and the whole world. For example, although the findings presented in this article are from 31 participants drawn from rural and urban Zambia, they should not be generalized to other parts of the world. This is because what may be true in one setting may not be true in other settings (Kabelenga, 2014; Kabelenga, 2015; Kabelenga, 2016). Second, the study did not get the views of the perpetrators of physical abuse who suffered the actual negative consequences for abusing elder people. Thus, their experiences might be different from the perceptions and conceptions of the community leaders who participated in this study. Given its limitations, however, few previous studies have specifically examined the negative consequences of physical abuse on the perpetrators, so this represents a major strength of this article.

Implications of the findings for social gerontology, social work, public health education, practice and research

Critical reflections upon the above findings when narrowed down to social gerontology, social work and public health education, practice and research with regard to the phenomenon of physical abuse of elder people raise the following implications among others:

To begin with, Social Gerontologists, Social Workers and Public Health Workers should know that physical abuse of elder people does not only negatively affect the abused elder people. It also negatively affects the perpetrators of physical abuse. Thus, programmes aimed at helping the victims of physical abuse should not only be directed towards the abused elder people but should also be targeted to the perpetrators. For example reformatory and re-integration programmes should be targeted also at the perpetrators of physical abuse. As has been seen in this article, once reported to law enforcement agencies many perpetrators of physical abuse in rural and urban Zambia go through serious disorientation. For instance, they get arrested, fined, imprisonment, stigmatized, live in constant fear, they become vagabonds, they develop psychological problems and they destroy family and community relationships among other negative consequences. Those people need to be helped by Social Gerontologists, Social Workers and Public Health Workers in order for them to reform and get integrated back in their families and communities.

Arriving from the above, it implies further that elder abuse literature should be updated to include the negative consequences of physical abuse on the perpetrators. As already mentioned in introduction and literature review section the current social gerontology,

social work and public health education, practice and research with regard to the phenomenon of physical abuse of elder people focuses on the negative consequences of physical abuse on the abused elder people and not on the perpetrators. This is a narrow approach and limits the thinking of the students, practitioners and researchers. This barrier in educational knowledge needs to be broken to include the perpetrators. This is essential in the fight against elder abuse as potential perpetrators will be made to know the possible negative consequences to expect if they abused an elder person through academic knowledge and the literature that they read. For instance, through that knowledge, it is possible that some of the potential perpetrators would refrain from elder abuse.

Furthermore, from the findings of this study, it is clear that many negative consequences of physical abuse that the perpetrators have suffered in Zambia is due to strong laws and community norms and values against criminal behavior such as abuse of the elder people. The laws and community norms and values have been translated into reality by punishing the perpetrators of physical abuse both at community level and at national level. This implies that one possible way for Social Gerontologists, Social Workers and Public Health Workers to be pragmatic in the fight against physical abuse of the elder people is by fostering strong collaborations with community/traditional leaders and law enforcement agencies. At community level, Social Gerontologists, Social Workers and Public Health Workers should lobby traditional leaders to come up with strong community rules against elder abuse. At national level, Social Gerontologists, Social Workers and Public Health Workers should work hand in hand with law enforcement agencies such as the police and courts of law in punishing, reforming and re-integration of perpetrators of physical abuse of the elder people. Going by the recommendation made by the court judge in Zambia that in order to deter people from abusing elder people, cases of elder abuse should be taken to magistrate courts and not civil courts, it means that Social Gerontologists, Social Workers and Public Health Workers should lobby all countries across the world so that all cases of elder abuse should fall within the jurisdictions of magistrate courts, high courts and supreme courts. This has a potential to deter people from abusing elder people as they would fear the wrath of the courts of the law. This is because cases which get handled by these courts of law attract huge penalties once one is convicted (Heisler, 2000; Zambia Criminal Procedure Code Act, 1973; Zambia Moral Justice Act, 1996).

Lastly but not the least, the findings imply that Social Gerontologists, Social Workers and Public Health Workers should be constantly questioning and challenging the existing theoretical and empirical literature on elder abuse. In other words, it means that Social Gerontologists, Social Workers and Public Health Workers should be very critical about what they learn in classrooms or what they read in available literature on elder abuse. This requires them to be reflective of what is going on in different contexts, places, from their own experiences and experiences of other Social Gerontologists, Social Workers, Public Health Workers or other professional and non professionals dealing with elder abuse (Fook, 2002; Mullaly, 2007; Gray and Webb, 2013). As has been established in this study, physical abuses of elder people do not only negatively affect the abused elder people as widely shown in literature on elder abuse in academic institutions, journals and world reports. Rather it also negatively affects the perpetrators. Doing so may encourage undertaking further studies on elder abuse and

in so doing generate new knowledge which is essential in reconstruction and deconstruction of the existing knowledge by challenging and/ or expanding the literature on the negative consequences of physical abuse of the elder people. Policy and program directions on elder abuse can also be shaped according to the negative consequences of physical abuse taking place in that particular society (Kabelenga, 2014; Kabelenga, 2015).

Directions for future research

This article suggests two areas for future research:

First, because this article is based on qualitative research which makes it difficult to be generalized to other parts of the world, future research should be encouraged to investigate further the negative consequences of physical abuse of the elder people on the perpetrators. Undertaking separate studies in different regions of the world, for example in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America, and South America among others can be a good approach. In this way, it will be clear to know the negative consequences of physical abuse of elder people on the perpetrators in different parts of the world. This may help in informing social gerontology, social work and public health education, practice and research as well as local and international policies on elder abuse.

Second, since this study did not get the views of the perpetrators of physical abuse, future studies should examine the negative consequences of physical abuse on the perpetrators using the experiences of the perpetrators. This may help in bringing about a better understanding of the negative consequences that perpetrators suffer for engaging in physical abuse of the elder people.

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