

The Living Quarters of Students: A Call for Regulation

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Abstract: Housing is a critical facility for many academic institutions. It provides non-resident students with temporary accommodation while in school/university. The facility is expected to be conducive to learning and offer them a safe abode. However, housing facilities for students in many parts of the country is reported to be in a sad state. Catbalogan City is one of the many communities in the country hosting academic institutions. This paper aims to illustrate the sad condition of the dormitories of many learners in Catbalogan City similar to what news and literature reported. Results of the actual observation of dormitories and interview to 358 owners revealed that only 16% of these dorms has formal license to operate. About 46% has only village-level business permits where building code requirements are never imposed. Many of the students are forced to occupy non-compliant housing facilities due to scarcity and lack of financial capabilities. There are disaster risk issues as some of the safety requirements are missing in many dormitories. A large number of housing facility that is not compliant to building standards must be addressed the soonest to safeguard the students.

Keywords: dormitory, building code compliance, housing for students, DRRM, risks

1. Introduction

The government today is more interested in the number of students getting college degrees by removing several barriers, such as tuition fees and school requirements. The increase in graduation rates and levels of educational attainment may have little effect if learners don't get something with value (Bok, 2017). Housing facilities, both for students and the institutions' personnel, is considered to be one of the critical resources of higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as the Junior and Sr. High Schools. Well planned student housing facilities help produce graduates with desirable educational outcomes, including grades, social cohesion, and responsible citizenship (Onclin, 2014; de Araujo & Murray, 2010; Hassanain, 2008). The availability of quality housing

facilities encourages a large number of students from different countries to pursue higher education (Kolawole & Boluwatife, 2016; Roche et al., 2010). Many academic institutions in the US, Japan, New Zealand, and others have invested in housing facilities to attract enrollees (ICEF Monitor, 2013).

There is a massive demand for housing, but the unavailability of the same forces students to a daily commute. The majority of universities cater to a commuting clientele, with very few offering an on-campus residential facility (Vilasquez Garcia & Garcia, 2016). The influx of those seeking temporary living arrangements in major cities of the country makes the operation of dormitories and boarding houses a thriving industry. However, the lure of making money out of tenants has caused the proliferation of structurally-

questionable dormitories and boarding houses (Andaya, 2015). Inadequate student housing facilities encourage absenteeism and consequently, poor concentration for the students' academic work (Chiguvi, 2018). If students have choices, they would want a better accommodation while studying. Factors student considers in choosing accommodations include proximity to the school, well ventilated and spacious rooms, fees, and availability of utilities such as electricity and water tops the list (Zotorvie, 2017; Brillantes et al. 2012).

Housing, offices, institutions, and all other building infrastructures are governed by several standards. Three of which are crucial, which include the National Building Code of the Philippines or the RA 6541 and the Fire Code of the Philippines of 2008 or RA 9514 and the Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992 or RA 7279. These laws put a premium on the safety of the inhabitants. Permits are essential to ensure compliance with these codes.

Before Senator Andaya's call to examine housing for students' through his proposed bill, other senators of the country have also filed a similar bill. Former Senator Villar in his Senate Bill explained that the living conditions in many dormitories or lodging houses are far below normal living standards that need immediate government action. Several studies and news about dormitories in the country noted some issues such as structural defects, safety, and security endangering tenants (Domingo, 2019; Gallarde, 2018; PNA, 2017; Navarez, 2017; Cruz, 2015; Valderama & Villanueva, 2013; Sagarino et al., 2011). These are just some of the many reasons why senators Andaya and former senator Villar have proposed law on dormitories/student living quarters. They hoped that the living conditions of borders, particularly of

students, boarders, will significantly improve the soonest.

2. Objectives

The study aimed to present the state of students' accommodation in the City of Catbalogan using the existing minimum requirements as references.

3. Methodology

The study utilized a descriptive research design using a survey instrument and checklists as the primary data gathering tool examined. Camera to document the conditions were also used. All surveys and interviews, including the taking of pictures, was with permission. The identities of the participants were secured.

3.1 Participants/Sampling Method

There were a total of 358 dormitories identified in the study, 10 of which refused to participate. The identification of these houses used the snowball technique with initial information taken from at least 15 randomly chosen SSU students. Snowball was used due to lack of available information about these accommodations that even local authorities do not know about. Permits were requested from the authorities (Mayor and Barangay Chairperson) to access the identified student housing facility. Landlords/landladies or their trusted managers were interviewed, and observations of the sites were performed. For the lived experiences, the 15 students were interviewed personally for their lived experiences.

3.2 Instruments

There were two instruments used in the study. One is a survey checklists

administered to enrolled students in Catbalogan City. The second instrument is an observation checklist administered personally by student-enumerators. The enumerators were trained to use the survey checklist and how data gathering through observation is performed. An interview with landlords or dormitory owners was also conducted to check license/permits and validates observations made.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

Quantitative data are presented in tables and graphs. Mean, frequency count, relative frequencies, bars, and pie charts were used to summarize data observed. Qualitative data which were extracted from the interviews were grouped and presented in themes. Pictures were also presented for emphasis.

4. Results and Discussion

The foregoing is the profile of the dormitory operators, the dormitory itself, and the experiences of student boarders in the City of Catbalogan. The qualitative description of the boarding houses was also presented to describe border conditions.

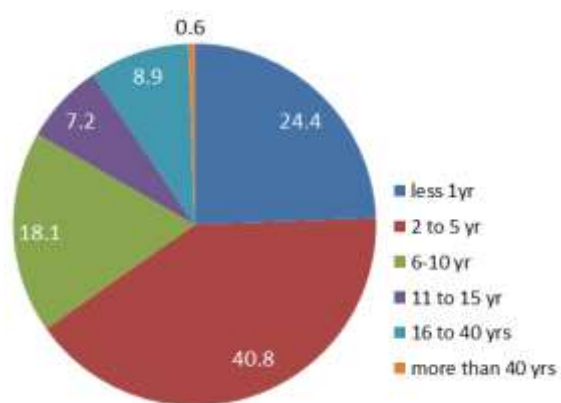


Figure 1: Years in Operation of Boarding Houses/Dormitories in Catbalogan City

4.1 Profile of Dormitory Operators

Figure 1 shows the number of operators and their years of operation. A total of about 348 (number not exhaustive as others refused to participate) was identified. About 40.8% or 142 have been operating between 2-5 years. There were 85 new boarding houses or houses that host students were established recently.

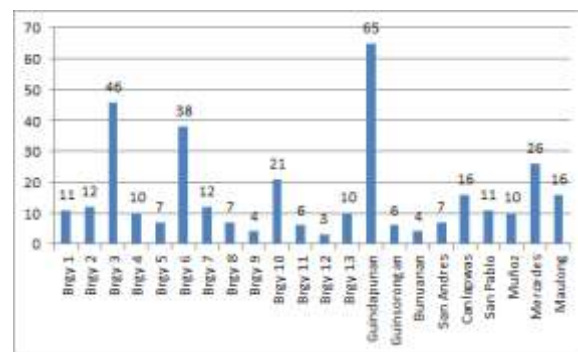


Figure 2: Location of Boarding Houses/Dormitories in Catbalogan

Most of these student accommodations are found in Poblacion Catbalogan (72.4%), around 18.7% (65 houses) are found in Barangay Guindapunan. This is because Samar State University (SSU), the largest Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Catbalogan, is located in this barangay. However, most of the houses adjacent to SSU, which belong to Brgy Guindapunan, are mostly technically considered informal settlers.

When asked what their primary consideration of choosing their accommodation is, most say, distance to school, downtown, and cost.

Participant 3 says, *"I choose to stay nearby my school to save transportation cost; I can save about PhP 500.00 per month."*

"Mas maupay didi kay harani la downtown ngan merkado, di man gud harayo ha skul ngan medyo barato" (I like it here because it's near downtown and the market; the school is not so distant, and it's cheaper here) says participant 5.

"I chose to stay here because it's within my budget," says Participant 6.

4.2 Building Characteristics of Dormitories

Shown in Figure 3 are materials used for the main structure (beam/column/etc.), floor, roofing, and walls by the dormitories in Catbalogan Samar. It appears that for walls, a good mix of plywood, wood, and concrete was observed. The floor, on the other hand, is mostly concrete and some wood. There are five dormitories with bamboo floor and one where floor is plywood on top of soil. Most of the roofing is made of GI sheet; many don't have ceiling making the dormitory relatively hot during the day. Columns and beams are mostly made of concrete and wood; some were made of steel structures.

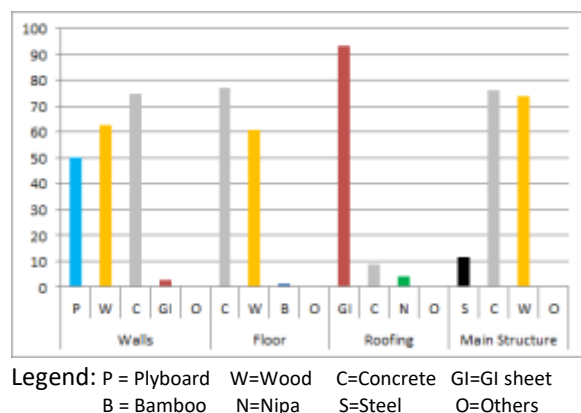


Figure 3: Building Material Used for Boarding Houses/Dormitories

Student renters shared about their accommodations through interview. Though they expressed that their accommodations were acceptable, student description of their living quarters reveals a very poor condition (see Figure 4).

"Didi la ako nakaturog ha salog, plywood an salog gin butang la ha igbaw han tuna. Kun nauran, mahulos didi, pero okay la, nakakaturog man gihapon" (I sleep in this plywood floor placed on top of the ground/soil. If it rains, this gets wet, but it's okay, I can manage to sleep) says Participant 10.

"The roofing is a GI sheet when it rains heavily its get a bit cold, I like it as I can sleep well, but it's different when it is sunny. It sometimes unbearable for my friends to stay in the room. I get used to it already," says Participant 6.



Figure 4: A Typical Dormitory Condition (L – Passageway to Rooms; R – Kitchen)

4.3 Boarding House/Dormitories Capacity

The rapid urbanization justifies that higher density results in enhanced liveability (Haarhoff et al., 2016). High-density housing is usually proximate to schools,

shopping, public transport, and employment, but if given a choice, they still want lower density housing (ibid). Dormitories are usually built nearby schools, and the closer it is to school, the more preferred it is. This perhaps is the reason that most of the dense dormitories in Catbalogan City are proximate to schools like SSU. Catbalogan has about 3,968 available beds spaces. Most available rooms have 2 to 4 beds; some can reach up to 8 occupants per room.

As shown in Figure 5, around six dormitories/boarding houses, which accommodates more than 50 (1.72%) boarders and most have less than 10 (59.2%). Most of these dwelling with less than ten boarders are houses where the owner's family lives with them. This living condition makes a homey feeling for the student boarders.

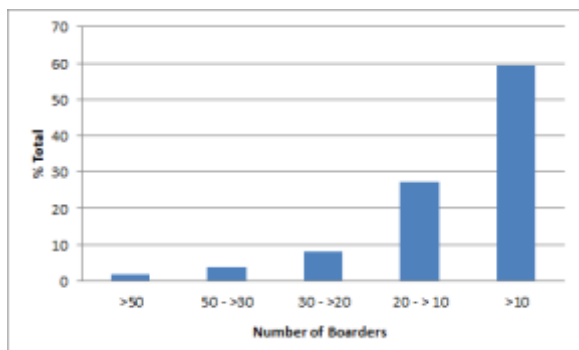


Figure 5: Occupancy Volume of Boarding Houses/Dormitories

Participant 13 says, *"I like it here, my landlady who lives with us is very accommodating, friendly. There are only four of us, we stay in the room, and we all come from one school."*

4.4 Dormitory/Boarding House Rates

Proximity to school, room and housing amenities, neighborhood, available services, is just some of the factors that command rate of student accommodations (Fernando, 2018; Manahan, 2018; Navarez, 2017). Bed spacers near Manila schools may be as low as PhP 1,500 to 3,000.00 to about PhP 15,000 or higher per month for accommodation alone (ADMU, nd; DLSU, nd; Maceda, 2015). There are still accommodations that are very affordable in Manila, such as those in the University of the Philippines (UP) primarily because it is government subsidized. A traditional dorm may cost as low as PhP 450.00 (UP, nd)

In Catbalogan City, the cost is a lot less than in metropolitan areas like Manila. A bed spacer in the city would cost around PhP 600-850 for a room occupied by 2 to 6. A student will have to pay more for additional facilities brought into the room that needs electricity like a rice cooker, electric fan, computer, or even cellular phones and other electronic gadgets. Renting an apartment can reach up to PhP 10,000.00, which can accommodate up to four to 6 people.

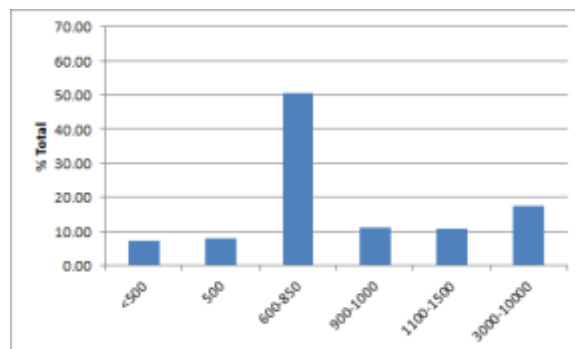


Figure 6: Rental Rate

Participant 15 says, *"I live with my Aunt who is also working*

here in Catbalogan, we have rented an apartment worth PhP 10,000.00. Another cousin lives with us.

Participant 10 expressed “barato la akon plete, PhP 250.00 la per month pero yano kala han sitwsyon”(very cheap rent, I only pay PhP 250.00 per month. You have to be contented with the situation.

4.4 Dormitory/Boarding House Amenities

Surprisingly not all accommodation has bathrooms/toilets (3) and bed (86). Safety facilities are the least available among all dormitories/boarding houses. Only 9.22% has an alarm device for fire, 17.29 % has a fire extinguisher, 22.77% have first aid kits, and 43.23 has emergency exits, which put the students in great danger. If the business has permits to operate, the said facilities (fire exit and fire extinguisher) must be present.

The dormitories also lack waiting area and gender-separated rooms, including bathrooms. Some conclude that such scenarios (lack of gender-segregated accommodation, no receiving area for visitors) are factors that lead to early pregnancy (Baquiran, 2018; Fernando, 2018; Politiko Southern Luzon, 2016; Miasco, 2016). Having no bathrooms means, the student taking a bath openly for everyone to see; but what about toilet needs? This condition is not unique to Catbalogan City alone but for the entire country (Refuerez, 2017; Navarez, 2017; Senate of the Philippines, 2012). There may be the best accommodation available, but due to poverty, students have no choice but to live miserably.

Participant 10 says, “naparigo ako ha gawas, waray man pariguan. Nag toilet ako han tag-iya hini na lugar. Harani man la ira balay sapit la” (I take a bath outside, there is no bathroom here. I use the toilet at my land lady’s toilet, they live nearby).

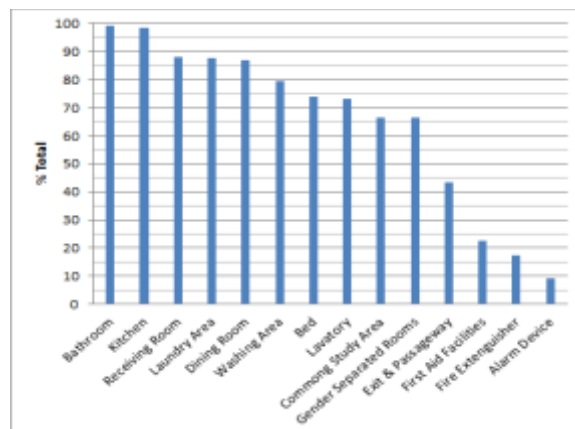


Figure 7: Boarding House/Dormitory Facilities



Figure 8: Top: A Laundry Area. Bottom: A Typical Bedroom for Four

4.5 Available Services

Not all accommodation is provided with water and electricity. Shown in Figure 6, only 99.42% are supplied with power, and 98.85% have water either from the local water provider or deep well. Very few have helpers (12.97%) to maintain cleanliness, some have accessible wifi (4.32%), and only 2 (0.58%) have guards. For many accommodations, the electricity provided is solely for room lighting; other uses of power tend to be charged. Water availability is also a concern, though these dormitories are serviced by the local water provider, the same is not all the time available.

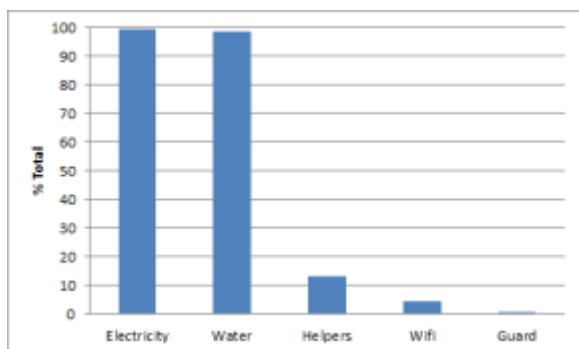


Figure 9: Available Services

"I like it here, free wifi; however, the signal is intermittent," expressed participant 14.

"We have faucets here, but the water is only available in the evening. We have pails to fill-in in the evening for tomorrow's use," says Participant 2.

It was also noted that some boarding houses do not have records who are their borders. Only 51.30% have profile records of their borders/tenants. A little more than half of the surveyed dormitories (59.08%) implements a curfew. The non-registry of

borders put to risk tenants from people who may have bad intentions such as robbery.

"There was one time three of my board mates lost their valuables, we suspected it was one of the boarders, sadly we have no exact details about him," says Participant 2.

"I am aware of the danger of being a bed spacer. I don't know the real score of my board mates. One day they are there another day their out. We don't have a say whose going to be our roommate," says Participant 1.



Figure 7: Dormitory near a Seawall

Some of the houses are found in areas that are high risks such as in slum areas and storm surge potential zones (see Figure 7), flood-prone, landslide-prone, and fire risk areas.

4.6 Permits to Operate

Temporary accommodation specifically for students is among the less regulated services in the Philippines. The poor regulation of dormitories or the absence of it results in abuse with some clients placed in hazardous situations. Other than the building code which regulates the construction of structures and the law to

control rentals, there are very few laws that touch heavily on dormitory/boarding houses. With the overwhelming reports about the abuse of student accommodations, call for its regulation have surfaced (Baquiran, 2018; Refuerzo, 2017; Andaya, 2015).

Shown in Figure 10 is the status of the housing facilities according to permits to operate. For the entire City of Catbalogan, only 15.85% has a boarding house business permit. More than half (61.38%) has barangay permits. Barangay permit-only is a not acceptable type of license as they don't have the people to inspect the suitability of a building to accommodate temporary dwellers.

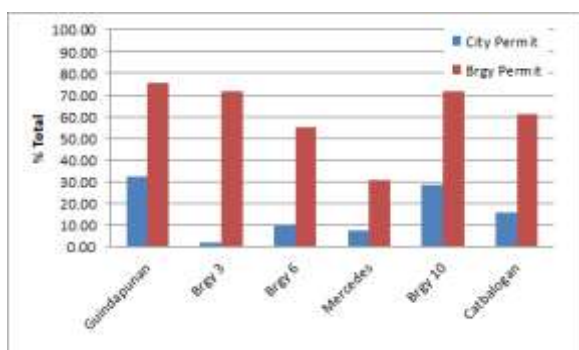


Figure 10: Permits to Operate

The huge number of housing facilities without permits relates to the number of houses without the necessary amenities as well as disaster prevention facilities such as fire exit, fire extinguisher, and alarm systems.

"I think an amon boarding house waray permit, pagkabaro ko informal settlers liwat hira didi. Months ago they received a notice na ginpapaiwas na hira kay mag titindog daw mall didi an province" (I think our boarding house has no permit, I found out they are informal settlers too. Months ago, they were requested

to vacate the area for the construction of a mall by the province).



Figure 10: One of the very few student housing with permits

4.7 Lived Experiences of Students

There was 15 students' participant in the interview to share their experiences as borders in Catbalogan. The participants come from three categories, seven from poorly conditioned accommodation, five living in moderately acceptable accommodations, and three in accommodation with a business permit. They were asked about their day to day activities in their accommodation, their satisfaction level, and their aspiration. The interview was able to generate the following themes;

- Poverty.** The participants cannot afford to rent a better accommodation due to financial constraints. They are satisfied they can go to school, and their living condition is their part sacrifice. The free tuition has helped them during their enrolment, but their day to day expenses are far costlier.
- Satisfied.** Overall the participants expressed satisfaction in their accommodation. Except for those coming from different income bracket, many of them expressed that except

parents not around, their living condition is not that far from theirs. Most of the students perhaps come from financially challenged families. More than their accommodation, they worry more about their daily food provision. They can sleep without beddings but not without food.

- c) University/College Housing. The students' hopes that the university could provide housing to many financially challenged students. They have seen the new building, and they wished they could also stay there. The university housing is far better than any available units outside the university. They believe they be more productive as a student in school-managed housing. They won't worry about safety and security as premises are always guarded.

The three themes suggest that despite the poor conditions of their accommodation, they are willing to take it as there are no other options available. The demands for housing are basically abused by the service providers. They desire to have better accommodation and achieve the goals of education, which is to learn with lesser worries on accommodation, security, and safety.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Catbalogan housing facilities for students like many cities in the Philippines are not compliant with building standards. This can be attributed to poor regulation practices on the part of the government as only about 2 in every 10 has a permit to operate as a housing facility. The bad state of many dormitories put the occupants into unnecessary danger. Despite the poor condition, many of the clients are forced to

live in it due to financial constraints. Despite the poor state of the accommodation, it is interesting to note that the borders still rated it at a satisfactory level.

It is highly recommended that the LGU must enact an ordinance to regulate housing facilities for students. The government needs to finance the construction of housing facilities for students to make it affordable and liveable.

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