



An Assessment of Safety and Health Issues in Selected Students' Boarding Houses of Lusaka City

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ABSTRACT

*Published Online: 03 August 2022

Safety and health management in learning environments is a growing concern globally. According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2009) academic attainment is regarded as a decisive factor that determines educational quality. Therefore, in pursuing such academic attainment, students have the right to learn in a safe and healthy environment. Safety and health in class rooms, student boarding houses or hostels and other learning spaces should be taken care of if learning is to be meaningful. With reference to the argument by UNICEF, this paper explored safety and health issues in selected students' boarding houses of Lusaka city. Using purposive and simple random sampling, a sample of 25 students living in boarding houses were randomly selected. Data was collected using unstructured interviews and focus group discussion. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. This paper established that the selected boarding houses in Lusaka city faced many safety and health challenges such as poor ventilation, fire safety, overcrowding, poor sanitary infrastructure, among others. This study established that as much as the selected boarding houses had put in place safety and health measures, there were still outstanding safety and health concerns. The study recommended that landlords for boarding houses could reduce the number of students in the boarding house to avoid overcrowding. Boarding houses owners should also ensure that waste is collected on regular basis and that boarding house owners to build more sanitary facilities and improve on the sanitation of the boarding house.

Keywords:

Safety, health, boarding, boarding house

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, student enrolments have grown rapidly in Zambian universities and colleges (Higher Education Authority, Zambia, 2021). There has been an increase in the number of private higher learning institutions. This has brought about increases in the demand for student accommodation. The establishment and development of student housing is a challenge for many universities in Zambia and Lusaka in particular as a result of the continuing extension of higher education institutions and rising student numbers. The universities in Zambia have limited accommodation facilities generally. Because of the fore going

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*Cite this Article: Kaiko Mubita, Inonge Milupi, Idah Daka, Mary Nalwamba, Valentino Lungu, Patricia Luwi, Norbert Tente, Kalisto Kalimaposo, Kasonde Mundende (2022). An Assessment of Safety and Health Issues in Selected Students' Boarding Houses of Lusaka City. *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies*, 2(8), 323-329

status quo, students who are not accommodated by their institutions tend to find alternative accommodation. Utmost, privately owned boarding houses are an alternative for students. However, these students' boarding houses also tend to present notable challenges to students. Safety and health issues are some of the challenges that students face in these boarding houses.

Safety and health issues are very paramount to students in any learning institutions. Mubita and Namafe (2016) noted that there is no meaningful learning that can take place if learners feel unsafe and insecure. This is because the learners may have divided attention between learning and preserving their own safety. Mundende and Namafe (2019) contend that quality education can only be attained if 'equal opportunity' is offered to all learners in all spheres of academic attainment. More so, Zambia's education policy document, Educating Our Future (GRZ, 1996), notes that teaching and learning are affected by the personal health of members of a school community, while school activities and what is learnt can be

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powerful factors that influence in promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils (Mubita and Namafe, 2016).

One of the environments that learners should be feel safe and secure is actually in boarding houses. A boarding house is a construction that has a function as a temporary residence for students and employees whose place of residence is far from the location of the campus or office (Mulianto, al. 2011). Boarding rooms must be eligible in terms of room size, the number of occupants, the area of ventilation, temperature, and humidity, so that boarding houses are not being risked places for transmitting various types of environment related diseases. Safety in this context refers to a state or condition of being protected against the physical, social, spiritual, financial, political, emotional, occupational, psychological, educational or other types or consequences of failure, damage, error, harm or any other event which can be considered non-desirable (Matias, 2020; Mubita, 2021).

Safety and health issues in most of the boarding houses are very frightening because most boarding houses have derelict infrastructure, poor sanitation, unhealthy conditions and security issues. As we all know, safety and healthy in boarding houses is an integral factor of good health and security. Various studies regarding boarding houses safety have been conducted both locally and internationally to see how the boarding houses should be and the things or guide lines that the owners of these boarding houses should follow (Ministry of Health of Indonesia, 1999; Mubita, 2016).

Lusaka city has a good number of boarding houses due to it being a capital city of the country and it has quite a number of universities and colleges. Following an increase in the number of private universities and colleges, the demand for student accommodation has become the biggest challenge in the city of Lusaka. As a result of this challenge, some learning institutions have entered into agreements with property owners to lease their premises to students to be used as boarding houses and other institutions have made it open to the students to rent any boarding house they are comfortable with which is near the school(Alam,2010).

According to Asefa (2013), safety and health issues in most of the boarding houses in the city of Lusaka are very scaring because most of the boarding houses have dilapidated infrastructure, poor sanitation and unhealthy conditions and poor security issues. Most of the boarding houses in Lusaka city don't have fire extinguishers, lack of sanitary facilities and security, and most of these boarding houses are not properly assessed if they can accommodate a lot of students or not. A lot of house owners are now turning their houses into boarding houses without the application from authorities and this is making the health and security of students in boarding houses to be at risk because they don't have stipulated guidelines on how a boarding house should be operated.

Boarding houses assessment on safety and health issues is very cardinal; this is because it is used to determine whether

the students or the boarding houses owners are complying with the legal obligation on how the boarding houses must be kept according to health Act in the laws of Zambia. Assessment of the boarding houses in the city of Lusaka will help to improve welfare and raise the awareness of the student on how the boarding houses should be (Alam, 2010). Against this background, this study assessed safety and health issues in selected students' boarding houses in Lusaka city.

2. AIM

To assess the safety and health issues in selected student boarding houses in Lusaka City.

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study were:

- i. to identify the safety and health issues of students in boarding houses.
- ii. to describe the impacts of safety and health issues on students in boarding houses.
- iii. to propose sustainable safety and health measures in boarding houses in Lusaka city.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Due to few accommodations within institution's premises, boarding houses have become the only option for most students in Lusaka. This study could help provide information about the safety and health of most boarding houses of Lusaka by identifying the hazards that may have great danger on the student's health and safety. This study could also be helpful and useful to students, parents and other researchers who would want to know more about the safety and health issues in student's boarding houses of Lusaka.

Assessing health and safety issues in boarding houses could help to provide an objective basis for decisions on controlling risks associated with these issues, especially for students and it will also empower businesses or companies dealing with issues of safety and health in houses with the necessary tools so that they can adequately identify and deal with potential risks. Once risks have been identified, it could be easy to mitigate them. Furthermore, assessing safety and health issues is fundamental to a comprehensive risk management program. Risk management, in turn, provides information for policy-makers participating in the overall decision-making process, which also uses other quantitative and non-quantitative information.

Therefore, this study is of value to the geographical area because the students in the boarding houses become members of the surrounding communities and as such, when anything happens to them the residents are all affected at the end of the day. Take for instance, the students are living in dirty boarding houses and then they get sick of flu and cough which will spread to the other members of that area despite them not being students. It is of value because if measures are taken to

keep the boarding houses safe meaning the other members of the area will also benefit hence making the entire place safe.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature from the global perspective has given more information on the problems associated with boarding houses and boarding facilities for students. For example, Maphoso and Mahlo (2014) conducted a comparative study between boarding and non-boarding schools in South Africa found that in boarding schools where sanitation was poor even the academic performance of students was poor compared to schools where sanitation was moderate and good. More so, Ddungu (2000) revealed that sanitary conditions in which people become accustomed to poor hygiene are dangerous to the psychological upbringing and to the learning process of a student. Thus, he recommended that schools should always ensure that buildings are kept clean.

A study by Brilliantes et. al. (2012) determined the living conditions of university students in boarding houses and dormitories in Davao city, Philippines. This is anchored on the premise that the physical and environmental components of these residential facilities could affect students' holistic well-being. Results demonstrated that students recognized their boarding houses and dormitories possessing good basic housing facilities. However, they felt that they were deficiencies in the provisions of safety and security facilities especially on fire escapes or exits and fire extinguishers. This was a reflection that most operators had violated some requirements set under the Building Code of the Philippine.

All the above reviewed literature confirms that different boarding houses in Lusaka city were facing safety and health challenges.

6. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH APPROACH

This study is situated in the interpretivism paradigm whose endeavour is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen et. al., 2007). According to Creswell (1994) interpretivism is directed at understanding phenomena from an individual's perspective and at investigating interactions among individuals as well as the historical and cultural contexts that people inhabit. Therefore, interpretivists argue that only through the subjective interpretation and intervention in reality can that reality be fully understood. Therefore, in relation to boarding houses, there are many interpretations of safety and health issues and these interpretations are in themselves a part of the knowledge being pursued in this study. Students in boarding houses themselves have a way of perceiving safety and health issues and realities. Its' benefits and misgivings, if any are perceived differently by students. The study utilised descriptive survey research design that mainly used qualitative research methods. Unstructured interviews and focus group discussions were used as data collection methods. Using purposive sampling technique, a sample size of 25 students

were targeted. The sample comprised students who lived in boarding houses in Lusaka city. In analysing the data, thematic analysis was utilised for this study.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the safety and health issues experienced by students in selected boarding houses in Lusaka City. In order to have a clear understanding of what issues were being faced by students in boarding houses, we took time to visit some boarding houses and interviewed students. The following issues were noted:

7.1 Overcrowding: Most boarding houses visited were overcrowded (80%). Some students were subjected to unbearable overcrowding conditions in boarding houses. Some boarding houses were unsafe and unfit for human habitation but students lived in them because they had no other options. Most boarding houses in Lusaka are being run by profit-driven landlords and they are providing substandard boarding houses to students which don't even meet the minimum safety and health standards of the Public Health Act in the laws of the country (Emine, 2016). It has been observed that most of people who once lived near or around universities and colleges have migrated to leave houses for rent to students. It has been recorded that most boarding houses in the city are overcrowded. Property-owners had demarcated big rooms of the original house into smaller rooms. These small partitioned rooms were saturated with bunker beds and in some places just single beds. The landlords charged rent per bed space. So if the house has been partitioned to accommodate eight (8) it simply means there will be 8 students per room and these same small rooms serve as bedrooms, dining rooms and study rooms all in one.

In relation to the foregoing, Asefa (2013) and Mubita (2016) add that, overcrowding poses a number of safety and health risks such as spreading of diseases. From our research findings, we observed that overcrowding is the biggest challenge that the students are facing according to our participants. Due to limited space, students are forced to stay with people whom they don't know their health status. Overcrowding also makes students start fighting for space, stealing, alcohol abuse, quarreling which can pose an impact on the safety and health of a student leading to poor performance. Students queue for space to cook or to use a line to spread clothes after washing. Stealing, alcohol abuse, fighting, quarrelling and promiscuity are common in some boarding houses.

Figure 1 shows the number of students that are occupying a single boarding house according to the responses collected from participants in different boarding houses. The graph clearly shows that boarding houses are of different sizes and this determines the number of students to accommodate. According to the graph, the number of students from the boarding houses explored ranges from 2 to 30 which are represented by the percentages 7.7% and 15.4%.

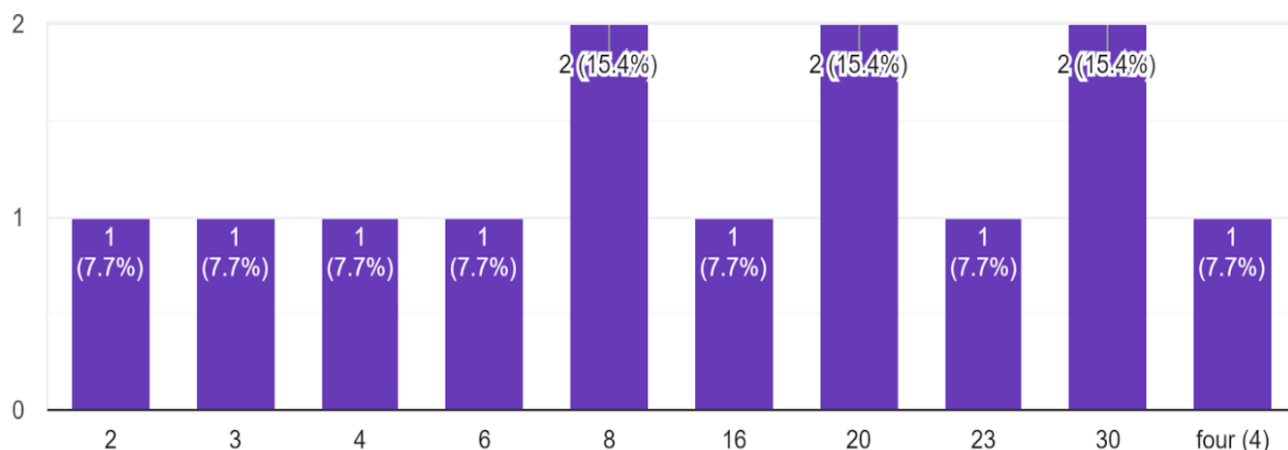


Figure 1: Number of students in boarding houses
Source: Field data

7.2 Lack of adequate sanitary facilities: Sanitary facilities can simply be defined as designated areas for use by the public that include a toilet, urinal sinks or a shower. Sanitary facilities help to promote good health at the environment where people live in because they allow the people to dispose their waste appropriately thereby preventing contamination of the environment and reducing the risk to themselves and the neighbor. According to Bush et. Al. (2017) and Mubita (2021), there is a significant relationship between health issues and poor sanitation. In most of the boarding houses assessed, there is poor sanitation. Poor sanitation in most of these boarding houses may cause a lot of health problems or issues such as diarrhea and cholera during the rainy season to the students and the community at large which have negatively affected the student's wellbeing.

Tegegne (2014) and Mubita (2021) add that every effort which the boarding house owners put to increase the number of students in their boarding houses could go to waste if water, sanitation and hygiene is not well monitored. As most of the student boarding houses in Lusaka city had inadequate sanitary facilities such as the toilets and showers. The conditions of some of these facilities lives much to be desired. When conducting our research, we found most of them blocked and not working, poor running water and in some there was no water at all which a health hazard is. Lack of adequate sanitary facilities can cause serious health issues and easy spreading of diseases (John, 2000).

While they modify the house to accommodate more students, most landlords didn't increase the number of shower rooms and toilets to match the number of students. A single toilet was being shared with many other students (Mark, 2017). With erratic supply of water, these toilets are often left in bad state. Both the toilets and shower rooms were over used as they handle more people beyond their design capacity. The floors of the shower rooms were constantly wet and slippery

causing slips, trips and falls to students. Students make queues to answer the call of nature or to bath especially in the morning. The conditions of these lavatories causes health risks to the students. Some students also complained of having had fungal infections on countless times due to using unhygienic toilets. They further stated that some of the problems they face are inadequate water supply, poor garbage management, lack of sanitary bins and lack of cleaning equipment to clean the toilets. The foregoing challenge was also noted by Mubita (2016) in his study on safety and health issues in selected schools of Mongu district and Chibombo district (Mubita, K, Phiri, T.K, Monde, N.M and Simooya, S.M, 2016). Figure 2 presents an assessment of the quality of sanitation among the boarding houses in Lusaka city. Among the houses visited and the people interviewed, 76.9% said that sanitation in their boarding houses was just okay and that they had nothing to complain about. While the other 23.1% have poor sanitation.

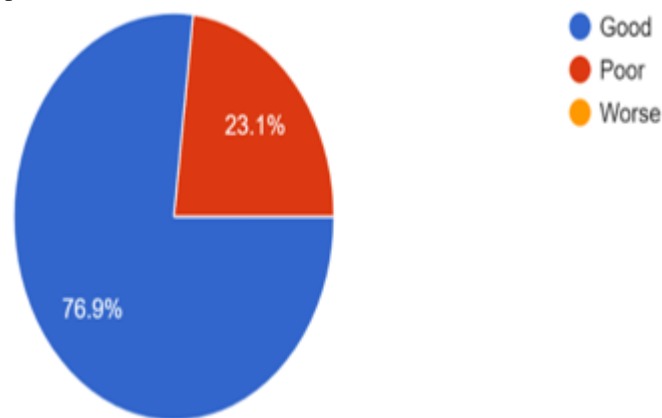


Fig 2: Sanitation at the boarding houses
Source: Field data

7.3 Poor housekeeping: The other issue noted was that most boarding houses had poor housekeeping. The kitchen is

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another serious concern in these boarding houses. No one took up the responsibility of cleaning the kitchen as long as they had cooked, cleaned their pots and plates that was okay. However, an untidy kitchen could have serious impact on students' health because dirty attracts so many diseases like cholera and others. One should take up the responsibility to clean the kitchen.

7.4 Electrical safety: Poor connection of sockets, adaptors and overloading electrical appliances in most of the student's boarding houses was one of the safety issues which was noted. This had the potential to cause accidents and death if not properly handled. Most of the sockets have naked wires and overload of electric appliances in student boarding houses. The naked sockets are hazards which could cause accidents at the boarding houses anytime. The students were exposed to dangers of electrical hazards and risks such as electrocution and shocks. They naked wires presented a great threat to the health and safety of the students.

7.5 Fire safety: During the survey of health and safety issues in the boarding houses, it was noted that most of the students' boarding houses had no firefighting equipment. There were no fire extinguishers, fire buckets and other firefighting equipment. Some boarding houses had long grass around them that could easily catch fire and cause mass destruction. Most boarding houses were also not fitted with fire-detecting or firefighting equipment like smoke detectors or fire extinguishers respectively. This scenario makes it difficult to fight fire in case of any emergency. It meant that in event that fire started, little could be done to extinguish it. Fire could, therefore, destroy property, destroy aesthetic beauty of school environments and destroy fauna and flora (Mubita, K, Phiri, T.K, Monde, N.M and Simooya, S.M, 2016). The Florida Department of Education (FDoE, 1993) also recommends that firefighting equipment should be located in main circulation paths to help quench fires in case of an emergency.

7.6 Poor ventilation: Some boarding houses had poor lighting, poor ventilation. According to the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security, a lack of good ventilation in schools has "demonstrably negative effects on student learning." In the dormitories, poor ventilation according to Mubita, Phiri, Monde, and Simooya (2016) can lead to the quick spread of disease, causing many deaths among students. Polluted air in combination with poor ventilation causes dry throat and eyes, concentration disorders, fatigue, headaches, shortness of breath, poor sleep, drowsiness, dizziness. In addition, complaints may develop such as chronic colds or respiratory infections, development of asthma or other lung diseases. All these could affect students in boarding houses.

7.7 Waste management: Wastes was poorly managed in most boarding houses visited. This had the potential of causing serious impact on the health of the students. In most boarding houses, plastic bags or bins were heaped in corners without being disposed on time which resulted in smelling or having bacteria that could be unbearable to students or unsafe and

unhealthy. At times bins may be collected from the boarding houses but they are heaped outside the gate which still causes health problems. In certain cases, drainages for these houses were poor which resulted in floods thereby inconveniencing students and attracting other diseases. Very few landlords, if any, sprayed their boarding houses to kill mosquitoes and other pests like cockroaches and bedbugs impacting on the health of students. Some houses leak during rain seasons while others have broken windows exposing students to cold and theft which has both impact on the health and safety of students. Students were also interviewed if their boarding houses were registered to waste collecting companies and if they were, how often does the company collect waste from the boarding house. Out of the 23 interviewed only seven (7) said they are not registered while the others stated that they are registered and waste is collected once a week, sometimes twice which is very rare. Poor waste management was also noted by Mubita, K, Phiri, T.K, Monde, N.M and Simooya, S.M, (2016) as one of the safety and health challenges in selected schools of Chibombo district of central Zambia. According to stakeholders, waste was poorly managed in schools under this study. Mostly, litter was swept, collected and put in rubbish pits. Incineration was the common method of managing waste.

7.8 Security: Furthermore, some students explained that their boarding houses didn't have enough security. Despite some saying that they are okay with the security at their boarding houses, others complained to say that they didn't have enough security at their houses. They said that the only security there is the fence surrounding the house. They didn't have guards that could help guard the place at night. It was further made known to us that the boarding houses without guards had been visited by thieves at least twice while in other boarding houses students complained that their gadgets were stolen when thieves broke in. In some boarding houses that did not have guards, some students were put in charge of making sure that the gate is locked at 22:00hrs exactly. But that was not security enough because the thieves could always make their way into the yard even if the gate is locked at 22:00 hours. All in all the students were not living in safe environments. They are at high risks of being robbed on a daily basis according to the data collected and the responses that were given.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of participants that have guards and those that do not have. 30.8% of the people asked said they have a guard while 69.2% said they do not have guards.

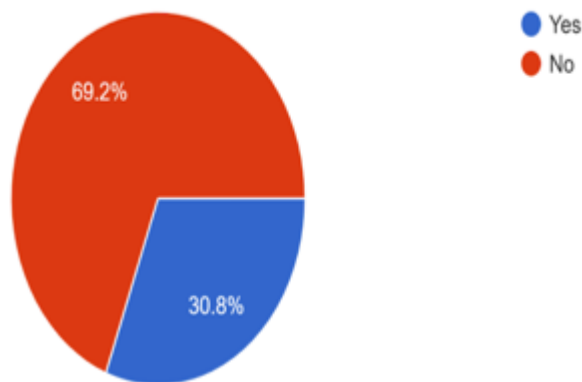


Fig 3: Percentage of respondents with guards and those without

Source: Field data

8. CONCLUSION

We can conclude that the students are not living in safe and conducive places. The conditions of most if not all the boarding houses in Lusaka live much to be desired. According to our research findings, more than half of the boarding houses in the city of Lusaka have safety and health problems. This entails that the health of the students that live in the boarding houses is at risk looking at the fact that these students are exposed to different hazards and risks on a daily basis. Apart from facing school challenges, the students are forced to deal with unbearable sufferings in their boarding houses. There is indeed great need for different stakeholders and government to intervene and look into this matter.

9. PROPOSED SUSTAINABLE MITIGATION MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF SAFETY AND HEALTH IDENTIFIED IN BOARDING HOUSES

It is clear that the surveyed boarding houses in this study had significant challenges in safety and health management. Therefore, this study proposes the following sustainable mitigation measures in order to solve the challenges identified:

- a) Reduce the number of students in the boarding house to avoid overcrowding.
- b) Boarding houses owners should ensure that waste is collected on regular basis
- c) Boarding house owners to build more sanitary facilities and improve on the sanitation of the boarding house.
- d) Lusaka city council to close some of these boarding houses that don't have proper living conditions for the students.
- e) Universities and colleges to build enough hostels equivalent to the number of students enrolled to reduce the cases of students going to stay in non-conducive environments.

- f) Universities and boarding house owners should work in partnership so that they can provide better houses to the students.
- g) Boarding house owners to fence their yards and put security guards in order to provide security to the students.
- h) To the students, they should avoid moving into boarding houses that aren't safe and healthy to stay in.

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