

Exploring Efficient Cemetery Management: Practices, Challenges, and Innovations at New Bilibid Prison Cemetery as a Basis for Improved Operational Effectiveness and Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

Efficient cemetery management is crucial for ensuring operational effectiveness and sustainable development, particularly in facilities with unique challenges like the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) Cemetery. This study investigated the existing practices, and challenges, and suggested innovative strategies to be implemented at the NBP Cemetery to improve its management and operations. Employing a mixed methods approach, data were gathered through surveys and semi-structured interviews with six personnel responsible for cemetery operations. Findings highlight the identified existing cemetery practices, the challenges faced by NBP Cemetery in terms of its operational effectiveness and sustainability and lastly, the identified innovative solutions to be implemented in addressing these challenges.

Keywords: cemetery management, challenges, practices, cemetery policies, NBP cemetery

INTRODUCTION

A cemetery is a place where dead people's bodies or their ashes are buried. It is where the remains of people, either intact or cremated, are interred in a grave, mausoleum, niche, or other edifice for the dead, either below or above ground. How the dead are buried reflects the geography, religious beliefs, social attitudes, and aesthetic and sanitary considerations of the community in which they are located. Its functions include the disposal of human remains, an archive of tombstones, to be used in studying history, and reservoirs of history. (Ypil, 2023) Cemeteries serve many functions but vary across cultures. In the Philippines, cemeteries serve many functions, including providing a final resting place for the deceased, offering a space for families to grieve, and preserving historical information.

Philippine cemeteries are subjected to various policies. Aside from prescribing and imposing the operations of cemeteries, these policies also govern the people within them. Regarding managerial aspects, workers of the cemeteries are expected to be knowledgeable about these policies. (Dizon, 2023)

The government plays a crucial role in preserving and sustaining cemeteries being relevant in society. Cemeteries require regulation to maintain order, uphold public health standards, and ensure respectful practices. To achieve the above, cemeteries need appropriate management (Dizon, 2023). In the Philippines, cemetery regulations are usually under the jurisdiction of municipalities and cities, generally local government units (LGUs). Furthermore, RA 7160 devolves to LGUs the responsibility of enforcing certain regulatory powers, such as reclassifying agricultural lands, enforcing national building codes, and managing cemeteries (Brilliantes, 2002).

In the year 2021, the Crematorium and NBP Cemetery Management Section under the GSD (General Services Division) was formed at NBP (New Bilibid Prison), Muntinlupa City. This aims to reduce and eliminate possible sources of corruption in the management of NBP Cemetery. This way, all the BuCor Personnel and PDLs (Persons Deprived of Liberty) at NBP are encouraged to become fully aware of their respective duties in the community. Furthermore, PDL cadavers, especially those who are forgotten and have no relatives, have been lodged in the Eastern Funeral Home. It is costly for the Bureau to keep the PDL cadavers for an extended period. Thus, apartment-type niches are one of the facilities the NBP cemetery has. It is not only to save funds but also

to combat the spread of Covid-19 during that time. The Bureau extended its services through partnership with the City Government of Muntinlupa and DOH not only to govern its people but also to protect the health and safety of the community. To address the problems and orderliness of NBP Cemetery, the Chief, CSO4 Arnold D. Pague, created guidelines for operating and stopping any illegal activities. The guidelines are the core of this section where it states who are allowed to be buried and utilize its jurisdiction. The NBP Cemetery now is only exclusive for BuCor Personnel, retired, 1st degree family members, and PDL. In the meantime, the NBP Cemetery doesn't allow creating niches, instead, it only allows to overlap to their old niches and exhumated. To process their request, it must have complete requirements and must be approved by the Chief, GSD, or Deputy Chief, GSD. All the available and vacant niches will be turned over to the Bureau for further future approved requests. In the meantime, the NBP Cemetery is fixing the policy that will be approved by the Doctrine and Policy Making Board through the project Management and Doctrine Development Division. The main work of the NBP cemetery Office are to maintain the AOR and assist with requests for burials and exhumations. Because it's a new section, the office needs more equipment and tools to be used in the office and at the cemetery, including the number of personnel and knowledge.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Dizon, K., & Donguiz conducted a study (2023) examining the socioeconomic status and social protection of Baguio City Cemetery Workers, as well as their knowledge of cemetery policies. The findings indicate that the cemetery workers in Baguio City have a partial level of satisfaction with social assistance programs, and have limited awareness of social awareness, of social insurance programs and labor market programs provided by the government. Additionally, their knowledge regarding policies governing cemeteries is considered moderate. Thus, the researchers recommended that the Baguio Cemetery workers should have orientation sessions to enhance their awareness and comprehension regarding the government's social protection programs.

Dizon (2023) delved into the level of knowledge Baguio cemetery workers have on policies governing cemeteries. The result showed that respondents are moderately knowledgeable of the identified cemetery policies. Therefore, the study recommended that the LGU of Baguio and CEPMO must maintain the level of knowledge of cemetery workers regarding cemetery policies through the continuous orientation of workers.

Magarang-Mocsanat, E., & Salapa (2024) explored the challenges and coping mechanisms of public cemetery caretakers of Panabo City and scrutinized existing policies, programs, and initiatives aimed at ameliorating the burdens faced by caretakers and enhancing their well-being. The findings of the study call for collaborative efforts from legislators, local authorities, and relevant stakeholders to develop long-term solutions to support cemetery caretakers and improve management practices in Panabo City.

Oyeleke, O. O., & Oloukoi (2024) examined the long-term viability of urban management systems for the deceased and the facilities and services provided by cemeteries. The findings showed that scarcity of amenities and services in cemeteries causes problems for urban management systems, such as adequate burying space, upkeep, and surveillance. Inefficient methods of handling the demands of city dwellers near cemeteries in city planning should be handled to enhance citizens' quality of life and protect and enhance the urban area.

Objectives of the study

Although studies have been conducted looking into the needs and challenges of public cemetery workers, there was a limited study conducted to look into the practices, challenges, and innovations for efficient cemetery management specifically in New Bilibid Prison.

Therefore, this study aims to look into the practices, challenges, and innovations for efficient cemetery management of the New Bilibid Prison. It seeks to:

1. determine the existing cemetery management practices at NBP Cemetery
2. investigate the major challenges faced by NBP Cemetery in terms of operational effectiveness and sustainability

3. determine suggested innovative solutions to be implemented in cemetery management at NBP Cemetery

Significance of the study:

It will benefit the cemetery administrators, caretakers and stakeholders as it provides the best practices and innovative strategies to enhance the management and operation of cemeteries in order to improve its efficiency, sustainability and function. It can also serve as a reference for local governments and policymakers in drafting guidelines for cemetery management. The study also adds to the existing literature on cemetery management providing insights that can be applied to other studies globally.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design:

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to examine the current practices, challenges, and innovations in cemetery management at the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) Cemetery. A structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide will be utilized to gather quantitative and qualitative data.

Population of the study:

The respondents are 5 uniformed personnel and 1 non-uniformed personnel currently working in New Bilibid Prison Cemetery, Muntinlupa City. To formally access the respondents, a letter (refer to appendix A) was sent to the General director's office requesting to conduct the study and gather data. Then, the researcher personally approached the respondents and explained why the research was being conducted before assisting them in answering the questionnaire.

Data Gathering Tools and Procedures

The data collection process started with the distribution of the questionnaire to the participants. Participants will have a week to complete the questionnaire, which will be available in printed form. Following the questionnaire, participants will be invited for interviews to further explore themes identified in the initial survey responses. Interviews will be conducted either in person or via virtual platforms, depending on participant availability and preferences.

Treatment of the data

All data were stored securely to maintain confidentiality. Quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire were analyzed using statistical tools, while qualitative data from the interviews were examined through thematic analysis to uncover patterns and insights. This integrated approach offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the challenges and identifying potential solutions in cemetery management.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
A. Role at NBP Cemetery		
Custodial	3	50
Administrator	2	33.3
Chief	1	16.66
Total	6	100
B. Highest Educational Attainment		

Technical/Vocational Training	0	0
Bachelor's Degree	5	100
Master's Degree	0	0
Total:	5	100
C. Length of service in the cemetery		
1-5 years	3	60
Less than a year	2	40
Total:	5	100
D. Size of the cemetery you manage		
Medium (5-15 hectares)	2	40
Large (more than 15 hectares)	3	60
Total:	5	100

The respondents are composed of 3 custodial, 2 administrator and 1 chief, all holding a bachelor's degree and are currently on duty at NBP Cemetery, which was established in 2021. Three of them have been working for 1-5 years while the two worked for less than a year. Most participants manage more than 15 hectares and all follow a Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for their day-to-day operations. Findings show that the cemetery allows Correctional Officers even retired COs, Persons Deprived of Liberty(PDL), and 1st degree Family relatives of COs are allowed to bury at the cemetery. Cemetery spaces are allocated for exhumed niches, personnel, retired COS, and family plots.

Problem 1: What are the existing cemetery management practices at NBP Cemetery?

Common practices in cemetery management at NBP Cemetery include traditional burials, landscaping and beautification, record-keeping and administration, and exhumation. They are currently implementing other practices including regular maintenance of grave sites, digital record-keeping of plots and burials, community engagement activities, customer service and communication and Japanese cemetery assistance. Most participants agree that these practices are very effective. The cemetery currently uses digitized and paper records as record-keeping methods. According to most participants, these practices are reviewed and updated daily and weekly.

Problem 2 What are the major challenges faced by NBP Cemetery in terms of operational effectiveness and sustainability?

Water management, land degradation, and pollution are some of the environmental issues which concern the cemetery's sustainability. There was a technological innovation being used in cemetery operations which include the use of biodegradable.

Most agree that technology is somehow effective in improving cemetery management. For NBP Cemetery's sustainable development, most respondents are unsure of any existing sustainable plan in place for the cemetery. The researcher noted sustainable practices currently being implemented as identified by the respondents. These include the use of eco-friendly materials for burials, water conservation management, and energy efficiency measures. Most respondents believe that sustainability is very important in cemetery management. Most agree that technology is somehow effective in improving cemetery management. For NBP Cemetery's sustainable development, most respondents are unsure of any existing sustainable plan in place for the cemetery. The researcher noted sustainable practices currently being implemented as identified by the respondents. These include the use of eco-friendly materials for burials, water conservation management, and energy efficiency measures. Most respondents believe that sustainability is very important in cemetery management.

Problem 3. What suggested innovative solutions need to be implemented in cemetery management at NBP Cemetery?

The respondents have suggested and recommended innovative solutions to improve the cemetery's operational effectiveness which includes additional personnel, training and seminars, and specific rules and regulations on burial procedures. The cemetery should also allocate areas for families to grieve and for leisure. It should also provide guidelines on visitations. Respondents suggest that there should be public involvement in cemetery enhancements and policies. It must also provide wheel-chair-accessible pathways. Records must also be enhanced and updated. It should prioritize setting clear rules and guidelines for visitors, community involvement, and maintaining and beautification of cemetery grounds. To address challenges in cemetery management, there should be an integration of technology and digital tools, strengthening the security of the cemetery's premises and providing Eco-burial options such as biodegradable caskets. Innovative strategies and forward-thinking developments, creating virtual memorialization platforms and providing pathways for visitors will contribute to the cemetery's operational effectiveness. To address environmental sustainability issues, respondents recommended that mowing should be limited, there must be involvement of the community which includes tree-planting and clean-up drives and lastly, adopting eco-friendly practices. All respondents agree that they all follow specific regulations and policies during cemetery operations. All the identified cemetery challenges limit the personnel workload which impacts the operational effectiveness of the cemetery. The respondents agree that all personnel must have training to enhance the cemetery's management. Currently, no recent innovations or new technologies have been implemented in the cemetery. Thus, the respondents suggest that there should be technology integration and smart infrastructures.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the following conclusions have been drawn. First, the cemetery has several existing management practices, such as traditional burials, recordkeeping, and landscaping, which are effective in maintaining day-to-day operations. Second, the NBP Cemetery faces notable challenges, including limited resources, environmental concerns, and gaps in personnel training, which hinder operational effectiveness and sustainability. Lastly, there is a need for innovative solutions, such as integrating technology, improving policies, and adopting eco-friendly practices, to address these challenges and enhance the overall management of the cemetery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For further studies, researchers can look into the guidelines and policies implemented for cemetery management. There is also a need for interventions such as providing training and seminars for all the personnel which is considered beneficial. By implementing these recommendations, the NBP Cemetery can achieve significant improvements toward enhancing the success and effectiveness of cemetery practices and management.

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