

COMFORT IN HOUSING AS IT RELATES TO HOUSING QUALITY AMONG LOW COST HOUSING INHABITANTS.

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ABSTRACT

Globally housing has being identified as one of man's basic needs, a means for economic growth symbolizing community investment, creating jobs and acting as a centre of skills and development in the community. The quality of life, health, welfare as well as productivity of man is greatly impacted by the availability and adequacy of housing. Housing as the largest consumption and investment of a life time for most individuals, makes it an important component of their quality of life. An adequate stock of decent housing and provision of related community facilities are among the fundamental essentials of human life. The Malaysian Five years housing policy, aims at providing houses for everyone irrespective of their income. Even though the provision of low cost housing in Malaysia has being quite commendable especially after the involvement of private developers, however various researches have been done which shows that these buildings seems to fall short of their expectations. This paper discusses the elements that contribute to the perceived quality of low cost housing environments: dwellings and neighborhoods. This element includes the physical and social characteristics of housing which are major contributors of sustainability in housing and quality of life of the inhabitants.

Keywords: Comfort, Low cost Housing, Residential Satisfaction, and Sustainable Housing.

Introduction

Housing is vital in the social and economic requirements of people, as a country's growth is reflected in its people attaining a standard of living. The role it plays in enabling both growth and regeneration will therefore need to be closely aligned, as the capacity to deliver housing of the right type, in the right place, and to an acceptable standard, is essential to the health and sustainability of cities and national economy (Ajanlekoko, 2001; Douglass, 2008; HC, 2008). It is therefore no surprise that government policy has long declared the goal of a "decent home and a suitable living environment for all the people in Malaysia. The government set out to achieve this through the establishment of different housing development policies in the various five year Malaysian plans and the second outlined perspective plan (OPP2) (1991 – 2000). One of the major objectives is to ensure that the low income group of Malaysia in particular have greater access to adequate and affordable shelter and also related facilities. It is however important to involve the direct benefactor of this schemes in the policy decision making process so that a maximum benefit will be achieved from the use of these buildings. This can only be achieved when the perspective of housing quality of the end users is put in place. This paper therefore sets out to know the characteristics of the house that influences the occupants' satisfaction. This paper intends to identify the factors that determine the residents comfort especially in low cost houses and its environment which contributes to their general quality of life.

A theoretical framework of this study was created from prior studies and findings from review of literature, based on evaluation and conceptual issues were identified.

This paper is looking at the issue of comfort in low cost houses. i.e. its availability or none thereof in low cost houses. Lack of comfort has many implications to its occupants which include health and safety problems, truancy at home which could lead to engaging in criminal activities and could also bring about low work output in workers. Sustainability advocates for comfort in houses. This research will be limited to the physical elements and the social and economic elements which lead to lack of comfort in a habitation.

Campbell, 1976; Das, 2008; Oswald, Wahl, Mollenkopf & Schilling, 2003; Mutsonziwa, 2007 in their findings suggests that a person's overall quality of life is influenced by a combination of social and physical domain making the housing domain a significant indicator of quality of life.

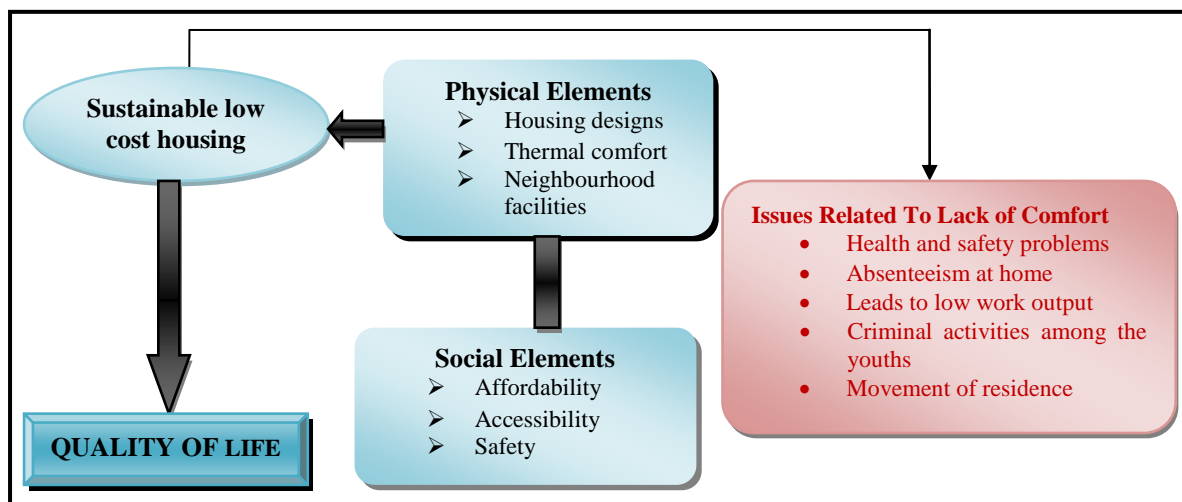


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

Sustainability in Low Cost Housing

Sustainability is commonly defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs”.

“A sustainable house is cost efficient over time, comfortable, cheap to maintain and complements our unique environments (Queensland Government, 2004). Inevitably sustainability strongly promotes making a house comfortable to its residents, future or present. As far as sustainability is concerned there is no basis for compromising the comfort of the residence in any way. The increasing awareness of sustainability in construction projects worldwide and its contribution towards saving the environments, improving building performance, achieving clients satisfaction and providing better value for money is evident (Addis and Talbot, 2001; Thomson et al, 2003; Abdellatif and Othman 2006).

Despite the development of new technologies to complement current practices in creating greener structures, sustainable buildings still are designed generally to achieve the objective of reducing the overall impact of the built environment on human health and the natural environment by:

- Efficiently using energy, water, and other resources
- Protecting occupant's health and improving employee productivity
- Reducing waste, pollution and environmental degradation

Comfort

Building features, such as number of bedrooms, size and location of kitchen, designs and quality of housing units are strongly related to residential comfort. Being comfortable with a neighborhood has been identified to be one of the important factor of housing comfort. These include neighborhood facilities such as schools, clinics, shops, community halls and etc (Ghani, 2006). Quality housing feature includes physical and non-physical characteristics. The physical characteristic comprises of location, housing design, types of housing and the residents comfort level. On the other hand, non physical characteristic comprise of the aspect of socio economic, people mixture and level of crime of that area (Aulia, 2006). In view of the fact that housing is central to the social and economic needs of people and communities it is highly justified that the study of the role housing plays as it relates to the quality of life be prioritized.

Effects of Lack of Comfort in Low cost houses

Some research suggests that customizable products that fulfill customers' specific needs and expectations will be the best answer for current trends in the housing market (Barlow et al., 2003; Dikmen, Birgonul, & Kiziltas, 2005). The role houses plays in the health and well-being of its occupants, their employment and educational endeavors, emphasizes the importance of making it comfortable. Some of the negative impacts are the residents moving away, poor neighborhood and community development and under-achievement in the children's education (James *et al.*, 2008).

Various effects have being attributed to the lack of comfort in a building some of which includes but are not limited to

- Health problems
- Absenteeism at home
- Less input at work
- Criminal activities among the youths
- Movement of residence from such buildings to a better and more suitable one which meets their aspirations and needs.

Concept of Residential Comfort

A resident's response to the environment says a lot about how comfortable the environment is and also determines the quality of life of the resident. A comfortable environment will attract more time in the building. Satisfaction towards the housing environment reflects residents' reaction towards their living environment. In this context, environment does not merely refer to the physical and environmental components of housing but also covers social factors and economic conditions (Kellekci & Berkoz, 2006). Individuals' evaluations of housing and neighborhood determine the way they respond to residential environment. (Berkoz *et al.*, 2009; Ghani, 2008 and Lu, 1999). According to Galster and Hesser (1981), theories of residential satisfaction are based on the notion that residential satisfaction measures the difference between households' actual and desired housing and neighborhood situations. They further state that residents make their judgments about residential conditions based on their needs and aspirations. A constructive judgment about a house will as such be dependent on what the residence expectations are about a home.

Residential satisfaction in low cost housing

A resident's response to the environment says a lot about how comfortable the environment is and also determines the quality of life of the resident. A comfortable environment will attract more time in the building. Satisfaction towards the housing environment reflects residents' reaction towards their living environment. Satisfaction towards the living conditions means no complaints are made since the housing units fulfill the needs and aspirations of the residents (Abdul Ghani, 2008). Previous studies on residential satisfaction have analyzed many variables such as housing, neighborhood, and residents' characteristics that affect residential satisfaction (Parkes et al., 2002 ; Galster, (1987 ; Lu,(1999). The studies shows that buildings features, such as number of bedrooms, size and location of kitchen and also quality of housing units are strongly related to residential satisfaction. Meanwhile, the finding of a study by Ghani (2008) indicates that neighborhood factors are dominant factors that determine the levels of residential satisfaction.

Housing Quality

According to Coker et al (2007), housing quality is closely related to housing standards and the quality of a residential area mirrors urban development, planning and allocation mechanisms between socio-economic groups and also shows the quality of life of the residents. Housing quality is one of the six housing norms, which also includes space, tenure, structure expenditure and neighbourhood norms identified by Morris and Winter's housing adjustment and adaptation theory (Morris et al., 1976). Sengupta and Tipple (2007) noted that housing quality is a concept that is expressed differently in different contexts and its meaning varies conceptually for different user groups Although different people have distinctive views about pleasant (and unpleasant) environmental amenities, people share common experiences about many of those amenities. Based on theories in environmental psychology (Abt Associates 2006; Staples et al. 1999), desirable amenities usually includes green space, newer buildings, availability of community recreational facilities, proximity to water bodies, and others.

Quality of life.

Human wellbeing or quality of life can be defined as the subjective life satisfaction of an individual. Quality of life may be regarded only for a certain section of life or for life as a whole. Dwelling satisfaction is a strong predictor of well-being. A person's quality of life depends on his or her satisfaction with several domains (Campbell et al., 1976; Henderson, 1987; Marans, 2003; Peck & Stewart, 1985; O Leary, & Mutsonziwa, 2007). In this instance it is focused on comfort in low cost buildings. An increasing body of evidence points to the role housing plays as an essential platform for human and community development

According to recent Euro barometer studies, conducted by the European Commission in 28 European countries, having a good job and adequate accommodation are viewed, on average, as the most necessary requirements for having a good life (Delhey, 2004).The concept of adequate accommodation involves one that fulfils the needs and aspiration of its inhabitants. This study is of the opinion that when occupants ideas of what makes their house comfortable is included in the planning stage of a building occupants of said buildings are more satisfied with life in general and this will lead to a more positive contribution to society and to the development of their nations.

Conclusion

It is an established fact that low cost housing is one of the ways of housing people with low income in the world. The residents of this building are undoubtedly more in any country contributing largely to the economic growth of the country through hard work and dedication. They are the largest in the human resources that contribute to nation's growth. The living condition for the lower income group in the low cost flats should not be negotiated in any way. Having identified the different roles housing plays in the lives of an individual, making it as comfortable as possible for its inhabitants cannot be overemphasized. It is an established fact that comfort in the life of any individual is essential in the contribution to humans' quality of life.

To improve quality of life the different stages of delivering a low cost house should involve the end users as the opinion when implemented early will improve the satisfaction rate amongst the residents.

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