



Residential satisfaction among aging people living in place

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ABSTRACT

Residential satisfaction is a significant topic in environmental psychology yet there is little research on residential satisfaction among elders. This research aims to identify the cognitive structure of residential satisfaction of elderly persons living in their own dwellings and to identify demographic and psychological variables related to this residential satisfaction. One hundred and three participants, ranging in age from 72 to 86 years old and living at home in the central France, answered (a) a purpose-developed questionnaire to measure their residential satisfaction, (b) an environmental quality questionnaire aimed at evaluating both the physical and social environments, and (c) several psychological variables including: the ESV, a French adaptation of the Satisfaction with Life Scale which examines the general well-being of aging people; and three single well-being items assessing financial well-being, perceived health, and perception of oneself as active. The results indicated that in this sample, residential satisfaction corresponds to a four-dimension structure organized by physical location rather than psychological or behavioral aspects. The four components were the local area, access to services, relations with neighbors, and the home itself. Satisfaction with each component was related to different predictors, supporting the idea that elders hold complex and nuanced views of their homes and neighborhoods.

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The relation between people and their residential environment is a significant topic in environmental psychology, possibly because home environments are one of the most salient environments in human experience (Lawrence, 2002; Tognoli, 1987). For elders – especially those with physical and financial limitations – home is often the central focus of their days, making it even more important to understand the personal and environmental predictors of residential satisfaction. There is a growing literature on factors that support elders' aging in place, but it is difficult to identify general patterns of results. The total number of studies is not large; research is done in different countries and among different ethnic groups and typically uses different conceptualizations and ways of measuring residential satisfaction, including shifting between objective and subjective measures. One purpose of the present research is to contribute an additional study to this growing field, using a French sample and scales specifically developed for this sample from in-depth interviews.

Like other researchers (Apparicio, 2006, p. 42; Bonaiuto, Aiello, Perugini, Bonnes, & Ercolani, 1999; Canter & Rees, 1982; Potter & Cantarero, 2006), we adopt a broad view of residential satisfaction on the assumption that we cannot and should not isolate the

dwelling from its surrounding social and physical community. Although the dwelling's interior supports private aspects and is certainly important to residential satisfaction (Altman, 1975; Apparicio, 2006), there is an emerging appreciation among researchers that focusing on the home per se has been inadequate for accurately conceptualizing and measuring residential satisfaction. More and more researchers consider residential satisfaction to be multi-faceted, comprising the home's interior and exterior, relationships with neighbors, the local physical environment, especially its functionality (safety, presence of and access to services), aesthetics (appearance), and health features (air quality and pollution). For example, several authors have included spatial (architecture, urban form), human (people and social relationships) and functional aspects (services and facilities) in their conceptual frameworks (Amérigo, 2002; Canter, 1983; Francescato, 2002). Others include these features and add broader contextual factors such as pace of life, environmental health/pollution and the community's upkeep and care (Bonaiuto et al., 1999). Indeed, in an overview of research, Bonaiuto (2004) drew on all of these perspectives and suggested four broad areas that have consistently emerged in the literature on residential satisfaction: spatial or physical environmental features (e.g., urban planning); social features and social relationships; functional supports and services; and more transient contextual features such as lifestyle, maintenance, and care.

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Research generally supports these multi-faceted conceptualizations. For example, [Adriaanse \(2007\)](#), following [Canter and Rees \(1982\)](#), drew items from a longer housing survey and found that the single housing scale could be subdivided into three strong subcomponents representing satisfactions with different domains or areas in the environment: the dwelling, the neighbors, and the broader physical-social neighborhood. Similarly, [Bonaiuto and Bonnes \(2002\)](#) developed comprehensive measures of residents' activities, needs, and preferences in order to understand use of and satisfaction with both residential and neighborhood settings. Like these authors and others ([Bonaiuto, Bonnes, & Continisio, 2004](#); [Bonaiuto, Fornara, & Bonnes, 2003](#); [Lawton, 1982](#)), we assume that residents are active users of their environment, and that an important basis of satisfaction is whether the individual's goals and needs are supported by the environment. Especially among the elderly who might be limited by health problems the skills and abilities of residents limit or enhance their engagement with their socio-physical environment which then influences their views and satisfactions. Thus we include predictors of satisfaction that tap participants' perceptions of the supportiveness of their social and physical environments and their own effectiveness as individuals (e.g., feeling healthy, feeling physically active). (See [Fig. 1](#)).

In the present research, we develop measures of satisfaction for different aspects of the environment and ask whether residents view these different domains similarly (i.e., whether the predictors are the same for each domain) or if different combinations of demographic, behavioral, psychological and health variables predict satisfaction within each environmental domain. We begin with a brief review of research on residential satisfaction followed by a review of research on neighborhood satisfaction among elderly respondents.

1. Residential satisfaction among the elderly

1.1. Demographic predictors

Studies of elders' satisfaction with their residential environment have yielded complex patterns of relationship between rated satisfaction and individual, physical and social characteristics. Numerous studies have aimed to identify the personal ([Bruin & Cook, 1997](#); [Golant, 1992](#); [Klein, 1993](#)) and environmental variables ([Carp & Christensen, 1986](#); [Christensen & Carp, 1987](#); [Evans, Kantrowitz, & Eshelman, 2002](#); [Jirovec, Jirovec, & Bosse, 1984](#); [Lawton, Brody, & Turner-Massey, 1978](#)) that might affect elderly people's satisfaction with the residence itself.

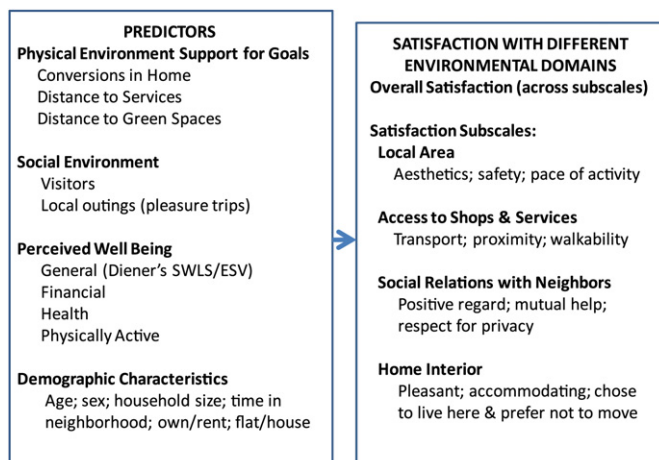


Fig. 1. Potential predictors and domain-linked satisfactions.

One theme has been to identify which demographic variables are associated with residential satisfaction, and the nature of those relationships. Research shows that elderly people have a relatively high level of residential satisfaction ([Cohn & Sugar, 1991](#); [Francescato, Weidemann, & Anderson, 1987](#); [Golant, 1984](#); [Lawton, 1991](#); [Rojo-Perez, Fernandez-Mayoralas, Pozo Rivera, & Rojo Abuin, 2001](#)), which can be higher than satisfaction reported by younger persons ([Baba & Austin, 1989](#); [Fine-Davis & Davis, 1982](#); [Jelinkova & Picek, 1984](#)). For example, [Fine-Davis and Davis \(1982\)](#); see also [Davis, Fine-Davis, and Meehan \(1982\)](#) studied housing satisfaction of over twelve thousand people in eight European countries and found that older people (over 55) were more satisfied with their dwellings than younger people.

Some research has found different demographic characteristics to be related to residential satisfaction. One study found that marital status, socio-economic factors, and race were negatively correlated with residential satisfaction, such that married, low-income, African American seniors were least satisfied ([Galster & Hesser, 1981](#)). The level of residential satisfaction has also varied according to sex, and has been higher among women in both a U.S. ([Golant, 1984](#)) and a Spanish sample [Rojo-Perez et al. \(2001\)](#).

1.2. Functional predictors

Other research addressed the physical limitations of aging, and examined how the residents' physical health and vitality related to residential satisfaction. For example, a sample of Spanish elders yielded a positive relationship between perceived health and residential satisfaction ([Fernandez-Ballesteros, 2001](#)); in a similar study, a sample of French elders showed that residential satisfaction was positively related to a behavioral indicator of health, residents' frequency of outings (short pleasure trips) ([Rioux, 2007](#)). In addition, several studies in the U.S. and Asia used items from the World Health Organization's Quality of Life Survey ([World Health Organization, 1998](#)) and found strong positive relationships between psychological well-being and residential satisfaction ([Brown, 1995, 1997](#); [Phillips & Yeh, 1999](#); [Siu & Phillips, 2002](#)). [Carp and Christensen \(1986\)](#) drew on ideas of "environmental press" to identify fit between residents' capabilities and the supportiveness of the environment and found significant relations between environmental supports and residents' satisfaction with either the home or neighborhood. Also consistent with ideas of press and need for a supportive environment, a qualitative analysis suggested that elders' choice of housing was strongly influenced by whether the physical environment and local amenities supported their mobility and health needs ([Hunt, Merrill, & Gilker, 1994](#)). Thus, studies of residential satisfaction in a variety of settings support the importance of effective functioning and a fit between environmental supports and residents' activities.

2. Neighborhood context and residential satisfaction

Other research has emphasized the importance of neighborhood context in residential satisfaction (e.g., [Bonaiuto et al., 1999](#)). This would include amenities such as green spaces, environmental health or pollution, upkeep and cleanliness, pace of life, as well as the social milieu. Considerable research shows that social and physical contexts are related to older adults' satisfaction with their immediate residence, supporting the view that satisfaction with the dwelling should not be separated from its broader neighborhood or community context ([Altman, Lawton, & Wohlwill, 1984](#); [Carp & Christensen, 1986](#); [Phillips, Siu, Yeh, & Cheng, 2005](#); [Rojo-Perez et al., 2001](#)).

In terms of the physical environment, we draw on research that considers multiple features of the physical environment, including

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