

TYPE OF STRUCTURE, SATISFACTION AND PROPENSITY TO MOVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an examination of the effect of type of structure on housing satisfaction and propensity to move. A national probability sample is used to compare the satisfaction levels of residents of single-family homes, mobile homes, apartments, multi-family and rowhouse dwellings. In addition to structure-type, the effects of tenure, housing quality and neighborhood satisfaction are examined. Sociodemographic characteristics of the household are included in the analysis. The findings contradict studies that found no difference in satisfaction between residents of mobile homes and residents of single-family dwellings. The present study finds a significant difference between the two groups, with mobile home residents being less satisfied with their housing. This does not translate into a greater propensity to move, however. Other alternative structure types do not differ from conventional housing regarding residents' housing satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile homes were heralded in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the housing of the future. The housing crisis that occurred then resulted in the rising costs and lowered production of conventional single-family housing. It left the lower- to middle-income housing market open to mobile home manufacturers (Morris and Woods, 1971; Vasche, 1980, Berry et al, 1979; Shelton et al, 1979). The baby boom generation constituted a large group of young, childless couples who were not ready to purchase single-family houses (Morris and Winter, 1979). At the same time, economic conditions curtailed production of conventional housing and more established families were also forced to try alternative housing (Morris and Woods, 1971; Shelton et al, 1983). In 1968, mobile homes accounted for 90 per cent of the new single-family homes priced under \$15,000 (Davidson, 1973).

Today, as the last of the baby boomers are housed and their housing demand declines, the manufactured housing market appears to have stabilized. About four percent of the U.S. population have chosen mobile homes as an alternative to conventional single family housing either out of economic necessity, location preference, housing-type preference or some combination of these reasons.

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This research examines the effect of type of structure on housing satisfaction and the propensity to move. The housing satisfaction of residents of single-family dwellings and propensity to move are compared to persons living in mobile homes, low-rise apartments, high-rise apartments, rowhouses and duplexes. Special focus is given to the differences in level of satisfaction of mobile home residents and residents of single-family houses.

Housing satisfaction among mobile home residents is of research interest because of the general image that mobile homes temporarily house families until they can afford something better (Shelton et al, 1983). Conventional single-family homes are regarded as the idealized "best housing situation" (Shelton et al, 1983). The question of satisfaction with mobile homes falls under the larger issue of the effect of housing structure-type on the quality of life. Few comparisons have been made among the various housing types available (conventional homes, apartments, multi-family homes and mobile homes) as to the residents' level of satisfaction with housing and quality of life. According to Shelton et al (1983), the quality of housing environments and the quality of life may differ considerably as a function of housing type. Exceptions to this lack of comparisons are studies cited in Shelton et al (1983) and Morris and Woods (1971) comparing residential satisfaction of mobile home residents with conventional housing residents. The general findings of the research, according to Shelton et al (1983) have been that residents of the two types of housing do not differ significantly in level of housing satisfaction.

A number of studies (Bharalwaj and Wilkening, 1977; Shin and Johnson, 1978; Dillman et al, 1979) indicate the importance of housing on life satisfaction. A brief review of the housing satisfaction literature is presented here. It focuses on the factors contributing to housing satisfaction. The effects of these factors on housing satisfaction and propensity to move are then assessed.

Morris and Winter (1978) suggest the "normative deficit" model of housing adjustment in examining the important factors determining the quality of housing environment. According to this theory, families evaluate their homes in terms of cultural and family norms. They argue that strongly agreed upon housing norms exist in American culture. Five such norms are identified. The tenure norm indicates a preference for home ownership. The predominant choice of a detached single-family dwelling is the structure-type norm in American society. Other housing norms, according to Morris and Winter (1978), are adequate space, quality and expenditure and neighborhood. Departure from one or more of these norms represents a housing deficit that may lead to housing dissatisfaction (Morris and Winter, 1978).

Strong norms favoring home ownership exist in the United States (Morris and Winter, 1978; Hohm, 1983; Rossi, 1980). Because of the desire to conform to the cultural norm of ownership, Americans who own their dwellings are expected to be more satisfied with their housing situation than those who rent. Morris and Winter (1978) state both economic (tax benefits) and as well as non-economic factors (psychic security, family security, status and prestige) that make home ownership an attractive and satisfactory situation.

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Studies show that owners are, in fact, more satisfied than renters with their housing (Caplow, 1948; Morris et al, 1976; Perch et al, 1983).

Structure-type, another important factor in housing satisfaction, is the focus of this study. It is closely tied to tenure as well (Morris and Winter, 1978). The ideal situation, according to the U.S. cultural norms, is owning a single-family detached dwelling (Michelson, 1970). Other structure types are considered less attractive, but may be appropriate at certain stages in the family life cycle. The norm for a single-family dwelling is relaxed for single individuals and for families with children in the household (Morris and Winter, 1978). Although apartment complexes, duplexes, rowhouses and mobile homes are acceptable alternatives for these life cycle stages, the norm for the single-family dwelling is still very strong.

Shelton et al (1983) find little difference in housing satisfaction between residents of conventional housing and residents of mobile homes in rural North Carolina. Apartment dwellers were significantly less satisfied with their housing than were conventional housing residents and mobile home residents. They cite studies (Lindamood, 1976; Pike and Stubbs, 1978; Moore and Crocker, 1979; Gray et al, 1980) showing few significant differences in housing satisfaction between conventional home and mobile home dwellers with similar socio-demographic characteristics.

Morris and Winter (1978) describe size of dwelling as another housing norm. Number of rooms and bedrooms, size of bedrooms, size of lot and sufficiency of housing space are all factors determining whether the size of a dwelling is a housing deficit for a family in a given life cycle phase.

Quality and expenditure norms are also important in determining housing satisfaction. Such factors as age of structure and interior and exterior condition of the structure are used in this study to measure quality of housing. Studies show that newer structures and structures in better condition are more satisfactory (Perch et al, 1983).

A final cultural housing norm, according to Morris and Winter (1978), is the neighborhood. Neighborhood deficits and the absence of neighborhood deficits are related to neighborhood satisfaction. In turn, neighborhood satisfaction is strongly related to housing satisfaction (Bross, 1975).

Demographic and socio-economic characteristics related to housing satisfaction include stage of the family life cycle, income, occupation, education and family structure (Morris and Winter, 1978). Stage of family life cycle, as measured by age of head-of-household and number of children in the house, affects satisfaction. The older the head-of-household, the higher the satisfaction with housing (Morris, 1976; Harris, 1976). According to Morris and Winter (1978), this finding could be due to improved housing as age increases or to the rising tendency to be more tolerant of deficits as age increases. Also, the number of years lived in the structure is positively related to satisfaction (Perch et al, 1983). Harris (1976) finds that the

number of children in the household decreases satisfaction. He suggests that this may be due to crowding or to the possibility that larger families give up housing quality to get a larger amount of space.

Household income is related to housing satisfaction with higher income households being more satisfied with their housing (Morris et al, 1976). The higher the income of a household, the more housing quality they can afford. Occupation and education of the head-of-household are generally related to income. As occupational prestige and education increase, housing satisfaction would increase as well.

Another socio-demographic factor that may influence housing satisfaction is the rural/urban location of the residence. Researchers find that cultural norms for housing are consistent across regions of the U.S. and among subcultures (Yockey, 1976; Belcher, 1970). This could lead to the conclusion that rural and urban dwellers do not differ in their levels of housing satisfaction after other background characteristics and housing deficits are controlled. However, Dillman and Tremblay (1977) find that rural dwellers are less satisfied with their housing than are urban dwellers.

A final factor that may influence housing satisfaction is travel convenience from the residence to work. Snyder and Weber (1983) call for the examination of the relationship between journey to work and satisfaction with housing. It is expected that the nearer the residence to the workplace, the more satisfaction there is with housing.

Much research has measured housing satisfaction and the effects on satisfaction of the housing deficits and background characteristics discussed above. However, most of this research is based on samples of public housing residents or residents of a single community or region (Shelton et al, 1983). This paper presents data from a national probability sample of U.S. residents through analysis of housing satisfaction by structure-type.

METHODS AND FINDINGS

The data used in this study come from the 1978 Quality of American Life Survey conducted by the Survey Research Center and the Center for Political Studies of the Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan. The data were collected from a nationwide probability sample of persons 18 years of age or older living within households in the contiguous United States.

The sample (N=3677) includes 2532 residents of single-family detached dwellings, 212 residents of mobile homes, 370 residents of duplexes or triplexes, 112 residents of rowhouses, 323 residents of low-rise apartments, 95 residents of high-rise apartment and 33 residents of other housing-types. The demographic characteristics of mobile home dwellers in the sample correspond closely with those of the 1980 Census as do those for conventional housing residents. Table 1 shows the mean age, income, educational level and number of

Table 1. Background Characteristics of Mobile Home Residents and Conventional Home Residents (both owners and renters) from the 1978 Quality of American Life Survey

	Mean Age of Respondent	Mean Education of Respondent	Mean Family Income	Mean Number of children 17 or younger
Mobile Home residents	42.6	11.0	\$20,676	.73
Conventional home residents	46.3	12.0	\$27,720	.97

children 17 and younger in the household for mobile home residents and conventional housing residents. The average mobile home resident is younger, less educated, has a lower family income and has fewer children 17 and younger living in the household than the average conventional housing resident.

Ordinary least squares regression is used to examine the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and normative housing deficits and housing satisfaction. The null hypothesis being tested is that there is no difference in housing satisfaction between residents of single-family detached housing and mobile home residents.

A composite dependent variable of four housing satisfaction items was formed by transforming an individual's scores on these items to z-scores, then summing the z-scores and dividing by four to obtain an average housing satisfaction score for each respondent. The four housing satisfaction items are listed in Table 2. The items are highly intercorrelated with correlations ranging from .62 to .71. Factor analysis of the items indicated that the four variables are tapping the same underlying concept.

Variables measuring housing characteristics, neighborhood satisfaction and socio-demographic characteristics make up the independent variables in this study. Housing characteristics include housing tenure, structure-type, interior and exterior condition of the structure and age of the structure.

The socio-demographic characteristics include age, occupational prestige and education of the respondent, as well as family income, number of children 17 and younger in the household, length of time in the house, rural/urban location and convenience of travel to work.

Table 2. Housing Satisfaction Items Forming Composite Variable

Item 1. Considering everything, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this (house/apartment/mobile home)? Which number comes closest to how satisfied or dissatisfied you feel?

	%
1. Completely dissatisfied	2.1
2.	2.9
3.	5.0
4. Neutral	11.8
5.	14.2
6.	26.0
7. Completely satisfied	37.9

(N=3674)

Item 2. Would you say that as a place for you (and your family) to live, this (house/apartment/mobile home) is very good, fairly good, neither good nor bad, or not good at all?

	%
1. Not good at all	1.5
2. Not very good	4.9
3. Neither good nor bad	6.3
4. Fairly good	38.5
5. Very good	48.8

(N=3686)

Item 3. We have talked about many different parts of your life and experience. I am going to ask you to think of the same things to make some final ratings. This time I want you to think of the scale on this sheet. Note that on this scale 100 would mean that the situation is perfect--as good as you can imagine it being, and zero would mean it is terrible--as bad as you can imagine it being. Please tell me where you would place your (house/apartment/mobile home) on that scale.

Mean rating = 75.93
 Median rating = 80.07
 (N= 3670)

Item 4. Before we finish we would like to have you think back to the things we talked about before, but this time using the scale in a different way. Tell me what number best describes how you feel about your (house/apartment/mobile home)

	%
0. No feelings at all	.4
1. Terrible	1.3
2. Unhappy	1.8
3. Mostly dissatisfied	4.2
4. Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)	13.6
5. Mostly satisfied	29.4
6. Pleased	34.7
7. Delighted	13.7

(N= 3650)

Table 3 shows the regression of the composite housing satisfaction variable on the normative housing deficit variables and the socio-demographic characteristics variables. R^2 for the equation is .39. This means that the independent variables accounted for 39 percent of the variance in housing satisfaction.

Dummy variables were formed for each housing structure-type with "conventional single-family detached houses" as the omitted category. Housing tenure is also expressed in dummy form with "home ownership" as the deleted category and "rents" and "neither owns or rents" as the other two categories. By dummy coding, the effect of each category can be assessed relative to the omitted category.

Mobile home residents are significantly less satisfied with their housing than are residents of single-family detached homes, controlling for other variables in the equation. In fact, no other housing structure-type category differs significantly from conventional housing with regard to housing satisfaction. The null hypothesis that no difference exists between mobile home residents' and conventional housing residents' housing satisfaction is rejected. There is a statistically significant difference between the two groups with mobile home residents showing lower levels of satisfaction even when the housing characteristics and socio-demographic variables are taken into account.

Tenure has the predicted effect on housing satisfaction. Renters are significantly less satisfied with their housing when compared to owners. Residents who neither rent nor own do not differ from the others.

The newer the structure, the higher the level of satisfaction. Also, the more well-kept the exterior of the structure and the cleaner the interior of the house, the more satisfied the residents are with their housing. These measures of housing quality affect satisfaction.

Neighborhood satisfaction is an important determinant of housing satisfaction. Neighborhood satisfaction is measured with a question asking respondents to rate how they feel about their neighborhood from one to seven with one being "terrible" and seven being "delighted". As satisfaction with neighborhood increases, so does satisfaction with housing.

Stage of family life cycle, as measured by age of respondent and number of children 17 and younger in the household, is related to satisfaction. Older respondents are more satisfied with their housing. As the number of children 17 and under in the household increases, housing satisfaction decreases. Number of years in the structure has no statistically significant effect on satisfaction.

Household income is related to satisfaction. The higher the income, the higher the level of housing satisfaction. Even though education and occupational prestige are often related to income, they do not have significant effects on housing satisfaction.

Table 3. Regression of Housing Satisfaction on Housing Characteristics, Neighborhood Satisfaction and Socio-demographic Characteristics

Variables	b	SE
Normative Housing Deficits		
A. Tenure (owns is omitted)		
1. Rents	-.2518**	.0464
2. Neither owns nor rents	.0608	.0681
B. Structure-type (single-family detached is omitted)		
1. Mobile home	-.2231**	.0689
2. Duplex or triplex	.0761	.0572
3. Rowhouse	.0463	.0938
4. Low-rise apartment (5 stories or less)	-.0625	.0653
5. High-rise apartment (6 stories or more)	-.0140	.1049
6. Other structure-type	.1210	.1617
C. Quality of structure		
1. Condition of interior	.0845**	.0184
2. Condition of exterior	.2057**	.0247
3. Age of structure	-.1481**	.0289
D. Neighborhood Satisfaction	.2115**	.0108
Socio-Demographic Characteristics		
A. Stage of family life cycle		
1. Age of respondent	.0035**	.0011
2. Number of children 17 or younger in house	-.0311*	.0135
3. Number of years in the house	.0000	.0000
B. Household income	.0013*	.0005
C. Education of respondent	-.0094	.0059
D. Occupational prestige of respondent	-.0000	.0001
E. Rural/urban location (urban coded 0)	-.0069	.0082
F. Convenience of travel to work	.0718*	.0188
Intercept=	-2.1015**	.1714
R ² =	.3852**	

*p<.05

**p<.001

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No significant differences exists between rural and urban residents' housing satisfaction. This contradicts past research (Dillman and Tremblay, 1977) and offers indirect support for the argument that housing norms are consistent throughout the U.S.

The convenience of travel to work is a variable that has not received much attention in the housing satisfaction literature. However, it does significantly affect housing satisfaction.

Propensity to move is the focus of the second analysis. Propensity to move is the potential, not actual, mobility. It refers to "desires, plans, indications or expectations about mobility" (Morris and Winter, 1978, p.167).

Potential mobility is measured here with a dichotomous variable representing whether or not a respondent would like to move. Using OLS regression with a dichotomous dependent variable violates some assumptions of the general linear model. The results, however, do not differ significantly from other statistical techniques when the distribution of the dependent variable is not badly skewed as in this case (Goodman, 1975; Gillespie, 1977). The regression coefficients reflect the change in the probability of wanting to move associated with unit changes in the independent variables.

Propensity to move is primarily related to lower housing satisfaction and neighborhood satisfaction (Morris and Winter, 1978). The composite housing satisfaction variable is included as an independent variable in predicting desire to move. Desire to move is also influenced by the housing conditions and socio-demographic characteristics reviewed earlier. The focus is on structure-type differences in the propensity to move.

Table 4 shows the results of the regression of desire to move on the housing characteristics, neighborhood satisfaction, socio-demographic characteristics and housing satisfaction. The R^2 for this equation is .29, indicating that the factors included explain 29 percent of the variance in whether or not a respondent wants to move. It can be seen that, in fact, neighborhood and housing satisfaction have the strongest effects on propensity to move. The lower the level of neighborhood and housing satisfaction, the greater the probability of wanting to move.

The only other variables that significantly affect desire to move are tenure, age of respondent and rural/urban location. Renters are more likely to want to move than are owners. The older the respondent, the lower the probability of wanting to move. Rural dwellers are less likely to want to move than are urban dwellers. Tenure and age of respondent have predictable effects on desire to move. Rural/urban location has a surprising effect. Past studies find rural residents to be less satisfied with their housing (Dillman and Tremblay, 1977).

Structure-type has no effect on desire to move. None of the structure-types differ significantly from conventional housing in propensity to move. Residents of mobile homes are less satisfied with their housing, but this does not translate into a greater desire to move.

Table 4. Regression of Propensity to Move on Housing Characteristics
 Neighborhood Satisfaction, Socio-demographic Characteristics
 and Housing Satisfaction

Variables	b	SE
Normative Housing Deficits		
A. Tenure (owns is omitted)		
1. Rents	.0918**	.0264
2. Neither owns nor rents	.0509	.0384
B. Structure-type (single family-detached is omitted)		
1. Mobile home	-.0006	.0389
2. Duplex or triplex	.0417	.0323
3. Rowhouse	.0774	.0529
4. Low-rise apartments (5 stories or less)	-.0708	.0368
5. High-rise apartments (6 stories or more)	-.0279	.0591
6. Other structure-type	-.0445	.0911
C. Quality of structure		
1. Condition of interior	.0151	.0145
2. Condition of exterior	.0119	.0141
3. Age of structure	-.2311	.0164
D. Neighborhood Satisfaction	-.5063**	.0066
E. Housing Satisfaction	-.1995**	.0125
Socio-Demographic Characteristics		
A. Stage of family life cycle		
1. Age of respondent	-.0016*	.0006
2. Number of children 17 or younger in household	.0083	.0076
3. Number of years in dwelling	.0000	.0000
B. Household Income	.0001	.0003
C. Education	-.0020	.0033
D. Occupational Prestige	.0000	.0000
E. Rural/Urban Location (urban coded 0)	-.0113*	.0046
F. Convenience of Travel to Work	-.0050	.0106
Intercept=	.6433**	.1001
R ² =	.2894**	

*p is <.01

**p is <.001

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study uses a national probability sample to address the issue of differences in housing satisfaction and propensity to move by type of structure. The findings on structure-type effects are surprisingly different from past research. Residents of mobile homes are less satisfied with their housing than are residents of conventional housing, even after the other normative housing deficits and background characteristics are taken into account. This finding contradicts other studies showing no differences in satisfaction between mobile home and conventional housing residents (Lindamood, 1976; Pike and Stubbs, 1978; Gray et al, 1980; Shelton et al, 1983). Mobile home residents are not, however, more likely to want to move.

Other findings support past research on housing satisfaction. Normative housing deficits prove to be important in predicting housing satisfaction and propensity to move. Home owners are more satisfied with their housing and less likely to want to move. Condition and age of structure are important in predicting satisfaction, but not in predicting propensity to move. Newer, better-kept structures are more satisfactory to residents. Neighborhood satisfaction is linked to housing satisfaction and to the desire to move. As neighborhood satisfaction increases, housing satisfaction increases and probability of wanting to move decreases.

The socio-demographic characteristic affecting both satisfaction and propensity to move is age of the respondent. Older respondents are more satisfied and less likely to want to move. Background characteristics significantly affecting satisfaction are number of children under 17 in the household and household income. Convenience of travel to work positively affects satisfaction. Finally, rural residents are less likely to want to move than urban residents, even though no significant differences exist in their housing satisfaction.

The major finding of this study is that mobile home residents are less satisfied with their housing than conventional housing residents. The conclusion could be drawn that cultural housing norms for the single family detached house in the U.S. are so strong that persons living in mobile homes are not satisfied. However, other non-conventional housing residents do not differ in level of housing satisfaction from conventional housing residents. If the cultural norm for structure-type is affecting mobile home residents' attitudes towards their housing, it should also affect apartment dwellers, multi-family home residents and rowhouse residents. All of these are alternative structure-types.

The implications of this finding are not clear. Even though this analysis found that mobile home residents are less satisfied with their housing, mobile homes do control a small, but steady, part of the housing market in the U.S. They fill a need in the low-cost housing market, making it possible for home ownership norms to be achieved at an affordable price. Also, this study did not find that mobile home residents are more likely to want to move than are conventional housing residents. Perhaps mobile home residents see their housing choice as somewhat less satisfactory than the ideal conventional home, but not problematic enough to influence mobility decisions. Further

research is needed to identify the unsatisfactory aspects of mobile homes and/or mobile home living.

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