

***Satisfaction of Elderly Residents in Subsidized Housing: The Effect of the Manager's Leadership Style***

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**Abstract**

The objectives of this study were to determine the direct effect of an apartment manager's leadership style and the direct and indirect effects of functional health, morale, and social activity on residential satisfaction using a path model probability sample of 210 elderly residents from 19 federally subsidized apartment complexes.

The path model positioned functional health, morale, and social activity as exogenous variables with leadership style as the intervening variable. Residential satisfaction was the dependent variable. Separate analysis was conducted for respondents with less than nine years of education and for those with more education.

The total effect of every bivariate relationship was greater for those with less education. The total effect of leadership style on residential satisfaction was .446 for those groups with less education and .267 for the group with more education; for social activity, .371 and .178; for functional health, -.093 and .014; and for morale, .134 and .019, respectively. The  $R^2$  for the group with less education was .327 and .102 for the group with more education.

The leadership style of the apartment manager had a significant direct effect on the residential satisfaction of the respondents in both groups. Social activity had a significant direct effect on the residential satisfaction of those respondents with eight years or less of education. Functional health had a negative total effect on residential satisfaction for both groups and morale had a positive, though minor, total effect for both groups on residential satisfaction. The residential satisfaction of those with less education was more strongly affected by both the direct and indirect effect of the independent variables than was the group with less education.

**Introduction**

Housing is a major factor physically, socially, and psychologically in the lives of older persons who become more dependent on their residential environment as their life space decreases and the quality of their environment becomes more important (Birren, 1969). Satisfaction with housing has also been shown to be an indicator of "quality of life" for the elderly (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976).

Research dealing with housing satisfaction supports the importance of management in housing for the elderly (Francescato, Weidemann, Anderson, & Chenoweth, 1979; Weidemann and Anderson, 1980; Carp, 1976). Accordingly, an effective strategy to increase residential satisfaction would concentrate on improvement of management of housing for the elderly (Butterfield & Weidemann, 1987). By establishing rules and policies, the manager provides the link between residents and owners. The manner in which rules and policies are established and enforced is also important. The fairness of rules and policies and of their application and enforcement is under the control of management. Wolk and Tellen (1976) found that those who lived in the presence of constraining rules that limited personal autonomy had lower levels of satisfaction. Management also appeared to be an important element in residential satisfaction for the elderly in government subsidized apartments (McAuley & Offerle, 1983; Degnore, Feldman, Hilton, Love, & Schearer, 1979). McAuley and Offerle

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(1983) also showed that perceived suitability with building rules was correlated with life satisfaction among those who frequently left the building to pursue outside interests. Francescato, Weidemann, Anderson, and Chenoweth (1979) have shown that satisfaction with management was among the strongest predictors of overall housing satisfaction in age-integrated public housing.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In previous research, variables contributing to the measurement of housing satisfaction of the elderly have explained only a small portion of the variance. Research on the contribution to housing satisfaction of the physical aspects of housing will not be of benefit for existing apartment housing stock. Remodeling apartment buildings to include desired physical attributes is usually economically and physically unfeasible. There is a need to focus attention on factors affecting the elderly apartment dweller that can be reasonably controlled and implemented at a reasonable cost. One factor that meets these criteria is the apartment manager's leadership style. The focus of this study was to determine the direct effect of the manager's leadership style on the residential satisfaction of elderly individuals living in subsidized apartments.

### **Leadership Style**

Leadership may be viewed as an influence process. In this process, effective leadership may be defined as the efforts of the leader which succeed in influencing the behavior, attitudes, beliefs, or values of another person towards the leader's goals (Richards & Greenlaw, 1972). There is no single, generally accepted theory which prescribes which strategies, approaches, or styles leaders should follow to effectively influence their followers.

Likert (1961) examined the manager-employee relationship in the context of business organizations. He theorized that the effectiveness of the manager, and hence the organization, is a function of the subordinate's perception of the manager and the extent to which the manager considers the employee's opinions in reaching a decision where the outcome has impact on the group will determine the degree of group commitment (satisfaction with) and involvement in carrying out that decision. In subsequent research, Likert (1967) identified four basic leadership styles which he viewed as residing along a continuum beginning with the most autocratic style, exploitative-authoritative, and moving through benevolent-authoritative style and the consultative style to the participative-group style, the most democratic leadership strategy. The usefulness of Likert's theory of leadership styles to this study is twofold: 1) it provides a framework for measuring categories of leadership styles along a continuum, and, most importantly, 2) this system is based upon the perception of the employees about the manager. This second parameter allows the use of an instrument completed by apartment residents that evaluates the apartment manager's leadership style as this relationship is analogous to the manager-worker relationship in a business organization. In both situations the manager is responsible for accomplishing organizational goals. Both types of managers develop, implement, and enforce rules and policies to assist in managing operations and meeting goals. The workers and residents must comply with their manager's rules and policies to minimize stress and enhance security; the workers to avoid dismissal; the residents to avoid eviction. The way in which an apartment manager interprets and enforces rules and policies, and interacts with the residents, may be considered a manifestation of the manager's leadership style.

### **Housing Management**

Management may be defined as a process which includes the elements of planning, controlling, guiding, directing, and coordinating the activities of others to achieve desired goals. Housing management is the application of these functions by a manager in a residential setting, most commonly apartments. The housing manager is charged with accomplishing the goals of the owner consistent with the priorities set by the owner. To accomplish the owner's goals, the manager must possess a technical understanding of building equipment, accounting skill for rent collection, management skills, and the ability to communicate effectively. Management establishes rules and policies in support of the owner's goals and assists in the management of the apartment complex. Research dealing with housing

satisfaction identifies the importance of management, maintenance, and aesthetics for housing the elderly (Francescato et al., 1979). Management policy dictates the maintenance standards and the degree to which the environment is aesthetically pleasing. Development of the rules and policies and the manner in which they are established and carried out is done in the context of that manager's leadership style.

Management policies affect the success of any housing project by encouraging or discouraging activities and the use of space (Pynoos, 1987). Christenson and Robinson (1975), and others (Carp, 1976; Bley et al., 1972) found that participation in organized activities is associated with well-being among elderly residents. The promotion and conduct of formal resident activities is usually initiated by the on-site housing manager in the absence of strong, active resident organizations. But even when residents are motivated to organize formal activities, the use of the designated space is at the discretion of the housing manager.

As the supervisor of the maintenance staff, the housing manager has control of the level of maintenance services provided to the residents' apartments and public areas. The housing manager also controls the aesthetics of the environment. An attractive home environment contributes to a friendly atmosphere and also promotes the perception that the environment is a safe place to live. Failure to deal sensitively with the special problems of elderly residents can impact their satisfaction. The more dependent the elderly resident, the greater the impact of administrative policies. McAuley and Offerle (1983) examined the suitability of building management and found a correlation between suitability of management, building rules, and the life satisfaction of residents who have fewer social contacts and travel infrequently outside of the building. Francescato, et al. (1979) determined that management was considered satisfactory by residents if it was accessible to residents for conversations, if complaints were followed up quickly, and if it was perceived that rules met the residents' needs.

Lawton and Nahemow's (1973) "Environmental Docility Hypotheses" suggests that an individual of high mental, physical, and social competence is relatively unaffected by the pressures of the environment. However, an individual of low competence is often adversely affected by a strenuous environmental placement. In order to counter the losses prompted by aging and loss of competence, the environment must provide added support (Regnier, 1983). Supportive, effective management can contribute toward providing a pleasant and satisfying environment (Butterfield & Weidemann, 1987) as does perceived "helpfulness" of management (Christensen & Cranz, 1987). Restrictive management policies may contribute to depression, a sense of helplessness, and accelerated physical decline (Pynoos, 1987).

The importance of the physical aspects of the housing environment have been identified as important components of satisfaction among the elderly (Lawton, 1977, 1980; Carp, 1976). However, Bechtel (1976), Gans (1967), and Marans (1976) argue that the social environment is more important than the physical aspects of the residential environment in determining residential satisfaction. Pynoos (1987) concludes that variations in management policies may have a greater effect on resident satisfaction than variations in the physical setting among housing for the elderly, "although clearly the two are related." This finding seems consistent with earlier research (Smith & Lipman, 1972) which found that a higher constraining environment was associated with a lower level of life satisfaction. Wolk and Telleen (1976) assessed elderly tenants' perception of the environment in regard to the presence of constraining rules and the role of the individual in determining project policy. They also found that more constraining environments led to lower levels of satisfaction.

### ***Psycho-social Variables***

In the research on life and residential satisfaction, three psycho-social variables frequently emerge as significant indicators: morale, activity, and health. Larson (1978), in a review of 30 years of research on the life satisfaction of older Americans, reported that health, morale, social interaction, and living situation are strongly related correlates of life satisfaction. Using a causal model of life satisfaction among the elderly, Markides and Martin (1979) found that health and activity were strong predictors of life satisfaction. Windley and Scheidt (1982) used a casual model with composite variables which contained measures of functional health, morale, and activity level in their analysis of the mental health of rural elderly. Variables which contained these measures emerged as significant predictors.

### **Methods**

The instrument used in this study was a self-administered questionnaire which had been pretested in a pilot study and modified as required. The instrument was used to collect data on the respondents' residential satisfaction, functional health, social activity, morale, demographics, and impressions regarding the manager's leadership style.

#### **Sample**

The sampling frame was the residents from the collection of apartment complexes in Virginia which have been built for the exclusive use of the elderly and are subsidized by the Section 8 federal rent subsidy program. Further, only those apartments which have been financed by the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA), and categorized as "new construction," were included. Section 8 complexes were selected to minimize the confounding effect of income variation among respondents, as all Section 8 recipients must be in the federal government defined income categories of low or very low. VHDA financed, new construction complexes were used to minimize the potential influence on residential satisfaction associated with older apartments.

At the time of the study there were 38 qualifying complexes containing 5,198 apartment units. The complexes ranged in size from 20 to 302 units. Complexes that did not have a full time resident manager were removed from the sampling frame. Complexes larger than 175 units were also removed from the sampling frame because complexes of this size usually have an assistant manager and in some cases a social director. The presence of more than one authority figure may cause the residents' perception of the manager to be blurred. These adjustments resulted in a sampling frame of nineteen complexes containing 2,156 units.

Sample size was determined using the method described by Cohen (1969). Using an effect size of .05, a level of significance of .05, and a power value of .80 produces a recommended sample size of 307. It was assumed that the response rate of 64.5% experienced in the pilot study was indicative of the sample population. Therefore, a minimum of 476 survey instruments were required to be distributed.

A total of 582 surveys were distributed to 10 complexes. The responses were delivered to either the odd or even numbered apartments as determined by the toss of a coin. The surveys included a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. A total of 210 usable surveys were returned for a response rate of 36.1%. The response rate was most likely affected by a restriction placed by VHDA which limited the survey to one follow-up letter. Also, respondents may have been unconvinced of the confidentiality of the survey and therefore withheld responses fearing reprisal.

The mean age of the sample was 73 years. The mean education level was 9.6 years with the largest group of 58 respondents (28.7%) having completed high school. The respondents had lived in their respective apartment complexes an average of 5.3 years. The majority (63.4%) were widows or widowers; 27.3% were either divorced, separated or had never been married. Thus, almost 91% of the respondents were living alone. Females comprised 89.3% of the sample and 80.4% were white which approximates the gender and race ratios of this population in qualifying apartment complexes at the time of this study.

#### **Measures**

Residential satisfaction, as used here, is a composite variable with measures of both housing and community satisfaction as suggested by Jirvoec, Jirovec, and Bosse (1985). This measure, developed for this study, used 18 questions and measured six dimensions of housing satisfaction and six dimensions of community satisfaction and used a five point Likert scale.

Leadership style was measured using a self-reporting scale developed for this study as adapted from Likert (1967) and used a five point Likert scale. This scale used 15 questions to measure six dimensions of leadership style identified by Likert (1967): leadership process used, character of motivational process, character of communication, character of interaction-influence process, character of decision making process, and character of control process.

Social activity was measured using a scale consisting of five questions adapted from Markides and Martin (1979) and used a Likert five point scale; morale was measured using Lawton's (1975) 17 question Philadelphia Geriatric Center (PGC) Morale Scale (revised); functional health was measured using Golant's (1984) 12 question self-reporting scale.

Table 1 reports the scale scores on the independent variables. For each variable, except leadership style, higher scores are associated with higher levels of attainment. For example, higher functional health scores reflect better health; higher morale scores indicate higher morale; and higher social activity scores reflect a more socially active individual. Scores on the leadership style scale indicate position on the continuum of leadership styles from the autocratic exploitive-authoritative (lowest scores) to the most democratic participative-group style (highest scores) (Likert, 1967). Leadership style scores were assigned by the respondents and reflect their perception of the manager.

The instrument was pilot tested and questions were analyzed to determine their contri-

Table 1. Scale scores on independent variables.

	Variable (Range)				
	Functional Health (12-48)	Social Activity (5-20)	Morale (17-34)	Leadership Style (17-85)	Residential Satisfaction (18-90)
Mean	39.5	13.2	28.5	56.1	55.2
Standard Dev.	10.7	3.7	2.4	9.0	7.1

bution to respective scales. Ineffective questions were removed and the final instrument was constructed with the most effective questions. The Cronbach's Alpha scores for the variables measured were: Residential Satisfaction - .86; Leadership Style - .93; Functional Health - .96; and Social Activity - .82. Morale was tested using the KR-20 analysis for dichotomous variables and had a reliability coefficient of .82.

#### A Proposed Casual Model

The proposed path analysis model positions Residential Satisfaction as the dependent variable (see figure 1). Functional Health, Morale, and Social Activity are exogenous variables. Leadership Style is taken as an intervening variable between the exogenous variables and the dependent variable, Residential Satisfaction. Figure 1 shows the model. Following a previous analysis of the data (Johnson, 1989) that indicated education was a significant factor in explaining the variance in residential satisfaction, the respondents were categorized based upon education. The first group was comprised of those respondents with fewer than nine years of education (N=72); the second group was those respondents with nine or more years of education. Each group was analyzed separately (N=126). The proposed model is limited to investigating the effects of functional health, morale, and social activity on residential satisfaction.

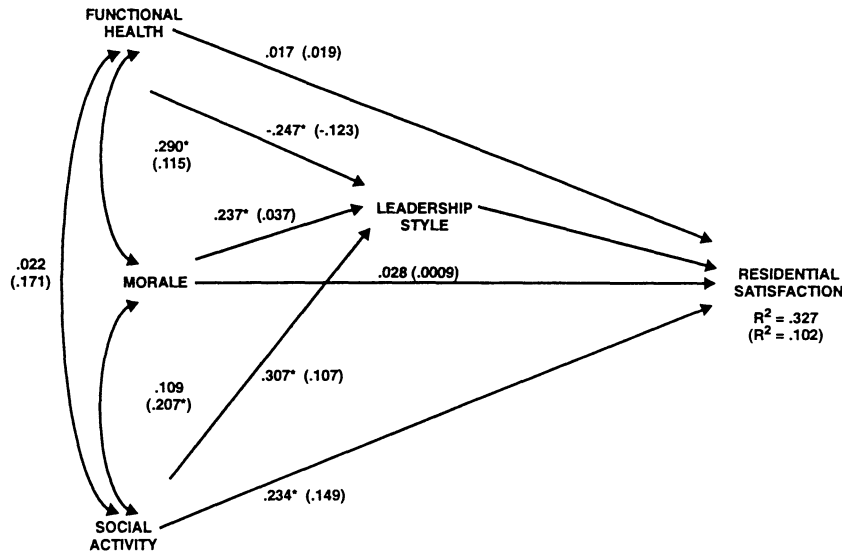
#### Findings and Discussion

Zero-order correlations among the variables in the model are given in the first column of Tables 3 and 4. For a correlation matrix of all variables, see Table 2. For the exogenous variables, zero-order correlations are given in Figure 1. In path analysis zero-order correlations represent the total standardized association between variables. Joint association results from unanalyzed correlation with other predictor variables (Alwin & Hauser, 1975). Spurious association is that part of the association between residential satisfaction and leadership style that is spuriously caused by the remaining variables in the model (Wolfle, 1980).

The coefficients shown in Figure 1 are path coefficients. They are standardized partial regression coefficients resulting from regressing each criterion variable on the variable(s) thought to be the cause of it. They indicate the relative importance of each variable for this

sample in terms of standard deviations and represent the direct effect of the given independent variable on the given dependent variable holding the effects of all other variables in the model constant. When the components yielded through decomposition of the zero-order correlations, the direct and indirect effects, are both positive or negative, they may be interpreted as a percentage of the total association (Wolfe, 1980).

Figure 1. Path analysis diagram: Education equal to less than nine (or nine or more) years.  
 \* = significant at the .05 level or beyond.



**Leadership Style**

Leadership style emerges as a significant positive cause of residential satisfaction. It is much stronger for the group with less education (.446) than for the group with more education (.267). Those respondents with more education may have been more likely to have held management positions in their working life and are possibly less threatened by those in management positions. They may have had better jobs, and thus more income, and believe themselves to be on a similar social level with the manager and may better understand the residents' rights as contained in the lease. Those with less education may have spent more time in "worker" positions directly subject to the influence and power of a manager and have carried that relationship into their current living situation.

**Social Activity**

The direct effect of social activity is positive for both groups and significant for those with less education. This relationship is consistent with the findings reported in many studies. The significant relationship between social activity and leadership style for the group with less education may be explained by increased contact with the manager by socially active residents. Increased contact may facilitate friendships and lead to a better understanding between the resident and the manager regarding the issues that effect residential satisfaction. Increased contact may also help to minimize the residents' apprehension regarding the manager's motives, power, and intentions regarding the residents.

**Morale**

Morale has a minor positive effect on residential satisfaction for both groups; however, there is a significant relationship between morale and leadership style for the group with less education. The indirect effect of morale, through leadership style for this group, accounts for 79% of the total relationship between morale and residential satisfaction. This may indicate the ability of the manager's leadership style to increase substantially the effect of morale on residential satisfaction.

Table 2. Correlation matrix. Those with less than nine years of education below the diagonal - those with nine years or more above the diagonal.

Correlations:	RESSAT	LDRSTL	SOCIAL	MORALE	HEALTH
RESSAT		.280*	.180*	.055	.019
LDRSTL	.525*		.093	.045	-.100
SOCIAL	.383*	.327*		.207*	.171
MORALE	.147	.198	.109		.115
HEALTH	-.046	-.172	.022	.290*	

Note: RESSAT-Residential Satisfaction; LDRSTL-Leadership Style; SOCIAL-Social Activity; MORALE-PGC Morale Scale; HEALTH-Functional Health

\*Significant at the .05 level or beyond

**Functional Health**

For both groups, the direct effect of functional health is small but positive. Larger values had been anticipated based upon previous research (Markides & Martin, 1979). The indirect effect via leadership style for the group with less education is many times larger (-.11) than for the group with more education (-.033). The negative relationship between functional health and leadership style may be explained by the relationship between a resident's health and continue residency. Federal regulations require that participants in the Section 8 subsidy program be capable of independent living. Discovery by the manager of reduced ability for independent living might result in involuntary removal from the apartment. Few housing alternatives exist for these individuals who qualified for their current housing because of their minimal income. Thus, while health may have a direct positive effect on residential satisfaction, it becomes a liability when considered via leadership style and the manager's ability to use health as a means to remove residents from their current housing.

**Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations for Further Research**

Much of the previous research on residential satisfaction has had limited utility as the focus has been on variables that are not easily controlled. For example, manipulation of the physical features that predict satisfaction is problematic after the building is complete.

Table 3. Decomposition table of the effects of variables - education less than or equal to eight.

Bivariate Relationship	Total Association	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Joint Association	Sourious Association
$X_1X_2$	.525	.446	.446	none	none	.079
$X_1X_3$	.383	.371	.234	.137	-.011	none
$X_1X_4$	.147	.134	.028	.106	.013	none
$X_1X_5$	-.046	-.093	.017	-.110	-.139	none
$X_2X_3$	.327	.307	.307	none	.020	none
$X_2X_4$	.198	.237	.237	none	-.039	none
$X_2X_5$	-.172	-.247	-.247	none	.075	none

Note:  $X_1$  - Residential Satisfaction;  $X_2$  - Leadership Style;  $X_3$  - Social Activity;  $X_4$  - Morale;  $X_5$  - Functional Health

Table 4. Decomposition table of the effects of variables - education greater than or equal to nine.

Bivariate Relationship	Total Association	Total Effect	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Joint Association	Sourious Association
X <sub>1</sub> X <sub>2</sub>	.280	.267	.267	none	none	.013
X <sub>1</sub> X <sub>3</sub>	.180	.178	.149	.029	.002	none
X <sub>1</sub> X <sub>4</sub>	.054	.019	.009	.010	.035	none
X <sub>1</sub> X <sub>5</sub>	.019	-0.14	.019	-.033	.033	none
X <sub>2</sub> X <sub>3</sub>	.093	.107	.107	none	-.014	none
X <sub>2</sub> X <sub>4</sub>	.045	.037	.037	none	.008	none
X <sub>2</sub> X <sub>5</sub>	-.100	-.123	-.123	none	.023	none

note: X<sub>1</sub> - Residential Satisfaction; X<sub>2</sub> - Leadership Style; X<sub>3</sub> - Social Activity; X<sub>4</sub> - Morale; X<sub>5</sub> - Functional Health

The identification of the manager's leadership style as a significant direct and intervening cause of variance in residential satisfaction may assist in meeting these criticisms. This analysis illustrates the importance of leadership style in influencing the residential satisfaction of older persons both directly and by playing an important mediating role between the three exogenous variables and residential satisfaction. The mediating effect of leadership style substantially increases the total effect of morale and functional health on residential satisfaction. Government policy makers and senior management of property management companies should recognize that it may be possible to increase residential satisfaction by training resident managers in effective leadership techniques and strategies. The training should be designed to take into consideration the apparent difference in the effect of leadership style based upon a resident's level of education.

Further research is needed to determine why those residents with less education are more strongly affected by the leadership style of the apartment manager. Additional study is needed to determine if significant differences in the effect of leadership style on residential satisfaction exist between groups in this population based upon sex, age, or race.

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