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Residential Happiness and Quality of Life



same neighborhood and social contacts in the area around the house (Canter and Rees 1982).

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Synonyms

[Housing satisfaction](#); [Residential satisfaction](#)

Definition

Residential happiness among older adults living independently at home is defined as a personal evaluation of various feelings in relation to the residential environment including the home, neighborhood, and neighbors. The following feelings appear to be most important for residential happiness and can be evoked by places, objects, and activities: free, connected, joy, at home, relaxed, safe, and comfortable.

The “home” refers to the house or apartment and the corresponding plot. The neighborhood consists of the (flat) building where the apartment is located and the area that surrounds the house. The nearby environments, both physical and social, are important because this is where residents carry out a large proportion of their daily activities (Aragonés et al. 2017). Neighbors are other people living in the same building or in the

Overview

Living independently at home becomes increasingly important in aging and “age-friendly” societies. Aging in place is an ongoing trend in politics and policy (Menec et al. 2011). Helping older adults to “age in place” at home is seen to benefit the quality of life and also to provide a cost-effective solution to the problems of an expanding population of very old people (Sixsmith and Sixsmith 2008). In current activities, to enable older adults to live independently at home, many governments follow the WHO Global Age-Friendly Cities Guide and checklist, in which housing is one of the eight domains of urban life (Plouffe and Kalache 2010). The WHO age-friendly housing checklist is very practical and recommends the following regarding aging in place: (1) housing is located close to services and facilities; (2) affordable services are provided to enable older adults to remain at home, to “age in place”; and (3) older adults are well-informed of the services available to help them age in place (World Health Organization 2007). Following this practical line of thinking, smart electronic technologies increasingly support activities of daily living (ADL) (Peek et al. 2016). Some local governments offer social structures to the neighborhood, including access to care and welfare

services, transportation and mobility options such as shopping services and access to social and health activities. Although researchers have studied residential satisfaction, it is unknown, whether these practical solutions contribute to general feelings of happiness and well-being in the long run. Recent research findings presented in this section show that besides comfort and safety, also feeling free, connected, joy, at home, and relaxed are important for residential happiness of older adults.

Key Research Findings

In current literature, the residential environment is mostly evaluated in terms of satisfaction. Residential satisfaction is mainly understood as a cognitive evaluation of the difference between what the resident possesses in their residential environment and what they would like to possess (Wu 2008). However, to study the relationship between residential satisfaction and quality of life, not only the objective quality of the residential environment is important, but also the subjective evaluation of experienced feelings in that residential environment. Speare (1974) already suggested to consider the residential environment from an attitudinal perspective and see it as predictive variable, as a prior variable that explains the adaptive behaviors performed by the resident to achieve a balance between what they have and what they desire. From environmental studies, however, it is known that individuals interact with their environment (Kelder et al. 2015). This suggests that a judgment from a person about his or her living environment is not sufficient to understand their (changing) experiences.

Example of Application

A new explorative, inductive study was designed to research what residential happiness means to older adults and how they can maintain and/or increase this. A comparative case study was set up to compare older adults living in different residential settings.

Data and Methods

The 37 participants in this study were all living independently at home, retired and aged 62–92 years old, with an average age of 74. Participants were purposively sampled by the most common residential settings for independent living older adults in different cities and regions in the Netherlands: owner-occupied, social housing, residential group, service flat, and a courtyard. The participants were first asked to take as many pictures as they liked of what is important to them for their residential happiness in the home, in the neighborhood and in relation to their neighbors. After taking the pictures, participants were asked to reflect on their pictures by answering questions in their personal logbook. Next, the participants were invited to one of the seven focus group interviews with other older adults living in the same residential setting. The interviews were based on photo voice, which is a participatory process by which people record and reflect on their community's strengths and concerns and which promotes dialogue and knowledge about important issues through group discussion of photographs (Wang and Burris 1997). First, participants were asked to write their personal definition of residential happiness on a sticky note, to put in on the wall and then to create one definition together. Next, the researcher put the pictures taken by participants on the table and asked: "Seeing these pictures, what do you think is important in the home/ neighborhood/ in relation to neighbors for residential happiness?" Analysis was greatly done by participants themselves during the focus group interviews, which were recorded on video and audio. Transcribed data, photos, and sticky notes were open coded by the researcher in the qualitative analysis program MAXQDA.

Findings

Older adults living independently at home defined residential happiness as "a personal evaluation of various feelings in relation to the home, neighborhood, and neighbors." From data analysis, it appeared that emotional involvement is a precondition for residential happiness and reflected by seven specific feelings: feeling free, connected,

joy, at home, relaxed, safe, and comfortable. These feelings are evoked by places, objects, activities, and sometimes other persons in the home and neighborhood, which are shown in Table 1.

Furthermore, the results show that residential happiness has three important characteristics:

1. Personal – it means something different for everyone due to different sensory observations, expectations and personal needs, wishes, and preferences (Bakker et al. 2012).
2. Changeable – it is subject to personal changes such as decreased mobility and to changes in the residential environment. Residential happiness changes with age because older adults spend more time in the immediate residential environment and pay more attention to it, experience a decrease in mobility and social contacts and an increase in physical limitations. Furthermore, they prefer to live near their children and to live in a secure and stable residential environment. Feelings may also change over a shorter period of time due to an event such as burglary, which may result in feeling unsafe (temporarily). This also implies that the seven feelings related to residential happiness might be experienced as positive and/ or negative interchangeably.
3. Arises in interaction, due to which residents experience an emotional involvement or connection with the residential environment (to a more or lesser extent). Individuals connect with the physical, built environment and with (personal) things, but also via social interactions enabled by the environment, such as visiting family and friends and neighbors.

Residential happiness appears to be especially important to older adults individually living at home for several reasons. First, residential happiness gives them energy, self-confidence and contributes to a good mood, the general feeling of happiness, mental balance and physical health. Second, residential happiness results in joyful behavior and positive thoughts that one wants to share with others (in the neighborhood). Third, residential happiness related feelings make people

aware of their residential wishes and needs, which makes it easier to adjust or change their living conditions.

Future Directions for Research

The conducted study shows that residential happiness requires an emotional involvement and interaction with the physical, built environment, with (personal) things, and with social interactions enabled by the environment, such as visiting family and friends and neighbors. Understanding of how and why places, objects, and activities contribute to residential happiness allows people to maintain or increase their personal residential happiness. This understanding may be used by older adults living independently at home and/ or by architects, project developers, and welfare workers in the neighborhood. The meaning of places, objects, and activities may be translated into design guidelines and applied in furnishing homes, designing neighborhoods, and organizing activities for older adults, for example.

Globally, the World Health Organization (2017) developed Sustainable Development Goals to secure healthy aging and to maintain the functional ability that allows you to do the things you value. Healthy aging implies preserving both physical and mental capacity as people age and making changes to environments (such as housing) so that they are accessible to and supportive of older people with varying needs and capacities. This study on residential happiness suggests that cities should also focus on wishes and preferences and the feelings that living environments evoke, besides the wide range of capacities and resources among older people (World Health Organization 2017). The important places, objects, and activities could be a starting point to increase the fit between people's needs and wishes and the environments in which they live.

Lastly, Van Hees et al. (2017) demonstrated that also intangible, so-called fourth places can be meaningful to older adults, because mainly these places make people attach to their place and a community. The authors found many of these intangible places in public places in

Residential Happiness and Quality of Life, Table 1 An overview of places, objects, and activities (with others) in the home and in the neighborhood that contribute to feelings of residential happiness

	1. Feeling	2.Places and objects in the home	3.Activities (with others) in the home	4. Places and objects in the neighborhood	5. Activities (with others) in the neighborhood
1	Free	Space, view, living room, garden, balcony	Hobbies, development, photos, collecting memories	Nature, park, infrastructure	Strolling
2	Connected	Guest room, dining table, balcony, garden, chair in front of the window, view	Personal conversations, sharing, connecting with nature and pets, waving to others	Bench, front yard, hallway, common room, community house, neighboring apartment, nature	Sitting outside, talking to others passing by, drinking coffee, eating together, hobby group
3	Joy	Living room, balcony	Watching children passing by outside, nature	Park (with playground), common room or community center, bar	Drinking (coffee) regularly, party, hobby group, pacemaker
4	At home	Living room, front door	Redecorating the home, maintaining the garden	Common room, public meeting places	Making contact regularly, understanding each other
5	Relaxed	Living room, balcony, garden, shower, own chair	Photos, reading, needle work, watching TV, and gardening	Facilities, common room, nature	Drinking coffee, walking in nature
6	Safe	Living room, own chair, stairs	Accessibility and help from family or neighbors in the household	Dark streets	Neighbors' quarrel, crime, interference of municipality
7	Comfortable	Living room, bathroom, and bedroom	Light, temperature, spaciousness, ground floor, service, shower, chair	Facilities, parking space	Daily activities within walking distance

neighborhoods (in line with Gardner 2011). Future research could study whether similar intangible meaningful places can also be found in the home environment of older adults living independently.

Summary

Residential happiness is a personal evaluation of different feelings in relation to the home, neighborhood, and neighbors. The most important feelings to older adults living independently at home are feeling free, connected, joy, at home, relaxed, safe, and comfortable. These feelings are evoked by different places, object, and activities (with

others) in the home and in the neighborhood. It is important to note that residential happiness is personal, changes, and arises in interaction with the residential environment. Therefore, individuals should reflect on their personal residential environment and feelings in order to increase residential happiness. In effect, this has a positive influence on their well-being and quality of life.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Age-Friendly Cities and Communities](#)
- ▶ [Aging in Place](#)
- ▶ [Aging in Place and Quality of Life](#)
- ▶ [Aging in Right Place](#)

- ▶ [Healthy Aging](#)
- ▶ [Housing](#)
- ▶ [Maintaining Quality of Life for Older Persons at Home](#)
- ▶ [Psychological Wellbeing](#)
- ▶ [Quality of Life](#)

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