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# Influence of Privatization Policies on Residential Satisfaction in Military Family Housing

Kirsten R. Hawley, PhD

## Problem

Housing is a key component of military members' perceived quality-of-life (QOL) and is central to their retention and readiness (Twiss & Martin, 1998). The outcome of the Military Privatized Housing Initiative (MPHI), as a privatization alternative to traditional governance models, has not received needed evaluation, however. Specifically, the implications of privatization on the residential satisfaction of Military Family Housing (MFH) residents, as a result of the implementation of MPHI policies, remains unknown.

## Purpose

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to provide insight into the implications of the MPHI policies through examination of the relationship between MFH privatization policies and residents' perceived levels of satisfaction. Additionally, the influence of sociodemographic factors on the residential satisfaction of MFH residents was assessed.

## Significance

Insights into the relationship between MFH privatization policies and residential satisfaction improve understanding of the MPHI policy's post-implementation effects on the end-users of MFH, the residents.

The study extends the knowledge of the implications of housing privatization for military families and offers opportunities for institutional learning and program improvement.

## Social Change Implications

The underpinnings of a strong national defense are today's all-volunteer military forces, which rely on healthy families who are supported in their basic needs for shelter.

## Theoretical Framework

**Policy feedback theory** explores how policy outcomes can influence future policy decisions and illuminate both intended and unintended policy consequences on the individuals and groups they aim to serve (Mettler & SoRelle, 2014).

## Relevant Scholarship

Renewed emphasis on MFH quality emerged as links between QOL issues and retention of the all-volunteer force surfaced (Department of Defense, Defense Science Board, 1995). **Public Private Partnerships** (PPPs) may improve quality and create value for money by bundling construction with the operation and maintenance of a project (Blanc-Brude, et al., 2009; Hodge & Greve 2009; Lenferink, et al., 2013).

**Measuring program outcomes** is critical in determining the effectiveness of PPP arrangements as conclusive evidence of bundling construction with operation and maintenance of a project are mixed (Blanc-Brude, et al., 2009; Hodge & Greve 2009; Lenferink et al., 2012). A **consumer's perspective** is one mechanism available to assess service delivery outcomes (National Audit Office, 2010).

For the **general population**, the perceptions of housing and neighborhood quality, perceived safety, security, neighborhood upkeep, and social ties were determinants of residential satisfaction (Buddin, Gresenz, Hosek, Elliott, and Hawes-Dawson, 1999; Dassopoulos et al, 2012; Hur & Nasar, 2014; Lovejoy, Handy, & Mokhtarian, 2010; Lu, 1999).

For the **military population**, perceptions of residential choice, privacy, affordability, appearance of the neighborhood, and safety were determinants of residential satisfaction (Bissell, Crosslin, & Hathaway, 2010; Parks, Carswell, and James 2009; Paulus, Nager, Larey, and Camacho 1996).

## Research Questions

**RQ1:** How does the level of residential satisfaction expressed by active duty military members residing in MFH differ by the type of MFH policy (government-managed or privately managed MFH)?

**RQ2:** To what extent does residential satisfaction in MFH vary by sociodemographic factors of military residents?

## Participants

The 5,613 participants were drawn from the 1999 ( $n = 5,302$ ) and 2005 ( $n = 311$ ) surveys of active duty personnel in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force.

## Procedures

This secondary analysis employed a repeated cross-sectional survey design using data collected in 1999 and 2005 by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) to gauge the attitudes of active duty military members on a wide range of topics, including housing and residential satisfaction.

To measure the residential satisfaction of one sample of the population prior to program implementation, and one equivalent sample after implementation, a **composite residential satisfaction scale** was developed by using seven survey items pertaining to housing and residential satisfaction.

## Analysis

An independent samples  $t$ -test was used to examine the differences between the two housing types.

On each data set multiple regression analysis was used to examine the extent of the influence of sociodemographic characteristics on the residential satisfaction of military family housing residents.

## Findings

**RQ1:** Unexpectedly, the transition to privately managed MFH resulted in *lower* levels of residential satisfaction of active duty MFH residents ( $t = -4.09, p < .001$ ).

**RQ2:** While both regression models had small effect sizes, the results showed

- 1999: Residential satisfaction in government managed MFH residents varied significantly ( $R^2 = .028, p < .05$ ) in: branch of service, paygrade, children/ dependents in the household, and race/ethnicity-Hispanic.
- 2005: Residential satisfaction in privatized MFH residents varied significantly ( $R^2 = .071, p < .05$ ) in one sociodemographic factor: children/ dependents in the household.

## Interpretation

The findings suggest that:

- Privatization as originally conceived may not be meeting the needs of military families and should continue to be examined; and
- Examination of residential satisfaction determinants for the MFH population identified similarities and differences with the general population to include differences in ethnicity/race – Hispanic, 1999 survey; and similarities with income, 1999 survey, and children and dependents in the household, 1999 & 2005 surveys.

## Limitations

Possible study limitations include:

- Generalization limited to MFH residents
- Operational definition of residential satisfaction
- Consistency of data over longer period of time

## Recommendations

Suggestions for future research include:

- Continue examination of implications of MPHIs to ensure arrangements create value for money,
- Employ consistent measures of housing-related items to permit longitudinal analysis,
- Explore implications of occupancy rates on MFH population, and
- Examine factors that influence residential satisfaction of the unique MFH population.

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