

# Tenants' Perception on Housing Maintenance Culture in Public Housing in Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

Public housing is one of the facilities for public servants in Sri Lanka. Maintenance of those housing are problematic due to lack of maintenance culture. Lack of studies focused on the issue and significant research gap existed in this area. The aim of this study is to investigate the tenants' perceptions of the housing maintenance culture in the public housing of Kurunegala district, Sri Lanka. The study data focused on public tenants living in schedule and general service quarters, and officials from 11 institutions' state departments. The study focused on mainly socio-cultural perception, proxemics, and motivation. The results indicated that socio-cultural perception, proxemics, and motivation variables highly influence the enhancement of the housing maintenance culture in public housing. The study suggests that the state should revisit its housing maintenance institutional policies and practises to ensure that bureaucratic aspects are lowered, that the housing maintenance regulatory framework be inspected to confirm effective housing maintenance, and that acceptable and satisfactory personnel be deployed within the servicing docket.

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*Keywords: Housing Maintenance Culture, Public Housing, Tenants Perception*

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## Introduction

Housing has been demonstrated to be one of the greatest determinants of a human's living standard and social status. According to Amoah et.al. (2019), the presence of adequate housing, whether in individual or several units, is a crucial aspect of a community's structural shape and function. The family belongings of the house represent the standard of life and the levels of success in the community (Bowers, 2009). So, housing is more than just a place to stay. It is a place where generations of relatives reflect on their way of life while also preserving their traditions and hereditary identities (Lens & Reina, 2016).

Public housing facilities are typically included in the pay and benefits packages of public sector employees (Rosow, 1976). In this sense, personnel at senior levels are typically provided rent discounts if the governmental housing units are not suitable to accommodate all of them (Abdulla, 2016). The fundamental goal of the state's commitment to offering institutional accommodations is to recruit skilled workers to less desirable country areas. This is backed by research that suggests housing ownership and accessibility are important drivers of labour's propensity to move (Oche et al., 2015). Family houses that are created progressively to accommodate families comprise public housing structures in various locations throughout many regions (Hashim et al., 2012). As a consequence of market inconsistencies, states step in to provide residential facilities in such economically desirable areas in order to recruit and employ talented employees. This is especially true in Sri Lanka, where the central government's goal via its devolution strategy is to spread prosperity to poor districts and, eventually, alleviate the

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excessive concentration of citizens in a few major cities (Roberts & Kanaley, 2006). Government quarters that are subject to the Recovery of Occupation Act number 7 of 1969 in Sri Lanka. Government quarters describe to any structure or housing that has been inhabited for the purpose of residence and has been supplied by the government on behalf of public officials to anybody who is currently working in the government (Pubadmin, 2022). However, depending on the goal of housing and construction, it is intended to establish an atmosphere for creative and devoted public officials by offering acceptable professional accommodations. Hence, most of those quarters have been regulated under the Ministry of Public Administration and Management of Sri Lanka, unless specifically mentioned otherwise. "Schedule quarters" and "general service quarters" are the two types of government housing. The scheduled quarters are mainly distributed based on the public workers' designations. General service quarters, on the other hand, that are assigned based on the officers' needs are not eligible to schedule quarters and hence are incapable of meeting their needs owing to a lack of availability or the need of the specific service (Sri Lanka Consolidated Acts, 1969).

This research seeks to bridge the current gap by concentrating on the public housing system in one of the moderately urbanized districts in Sri Lanka. The research tends to focus on the culture of maintenance within a moderately urbanised setting because governmental accommodation in these areas serves a supplemental meaning of motivating and capturing "key workers" such as instructors, health workers, security services officers, and municipal sector employees in relatively emerging and displeasing towns. As a consequence, they require at least the same level of scholarly interest as their more metropolitan counterparts. This study is important for policymakers and housing officials in the planning and development of public housing programmes.

### **The Objective of the Study**

There are two objectives focused on this study as follows.

- i. To study the housing maintenance culture in the public housing.
- ii. To examine the level of influence and motivation for enhancing the housing maintenance culture in the public housing.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Public Housing***

Governments across the world have embraced public housing as a strategy to alleviate housing issues, particularly in metropolitan areas (Hashim et al., 2012). Property is often produced, owned, or rented in the public sector to meet administrative and social demands as well as economic duties to the general public (Pashane Zuka, 2018). Public housing can be designated as a government property in any country (Kangwa & Olubodun, 2007; Abdulla, 2016). In general, the status of the asset, maintenance records, and living scenario may all influence the value and lifespan of public properties. According to the Oxford Dictionary, public housing is created by the state for individuals who cannot afford private housing (Oxford University Press, 2004). Furthermore, the United Nations Ad-Hoc Group of Experts on Public Housing and Urban Development proclaimed that public housing is a crucial requirement that includes important facilities for public workers, while it must also generate proper physical surroundings that connect such members of the family to the neighbourhood in order for it to emerge more successfully. According to Sri Lanka's Code of Establishment under Chapter XIX, public houses are any sort of accommodation available to the government and assigned for the intention of dwelling (Pubadmin, 2022). Large and moderate government housing organizations that operate well have grown into efficient housing development and management organisations with a wide range of duties and connections to public and private funding options. Hence, public housing is

presently more imaginative and active than it has ever been (Pacione, 1984). Despite the continuous clearance operation to eliminate the most seriously deteriorated stock, public housing's importance as a critical housing option is expected to remain for a long time (Oladapo, 2006; Ibem & Amole, 2011). This is because rent prices in the traditional market are growing faster than inflation, and demands for higher-than-average rent increments in the lower part of the rental business are reducing the supply of rental properties that are reasonable without public assistance (Hin Li & Siu, 2001; Makinde, 2016).

### **Maintenance Culture in Public Housing**

All buildings are subject to degradation over time owing to the inescapable mechanism of wear and tear, which is mostly caused by ageing (Yusof et al., 2012; Gawe, 2015). Building standards degrade due to elements such as climatic conditions, construction materials and quality, and an absence of maintenance (Nath & Sharma, 2014). In general, maintenance refers to the labour required to enhance or rebuild a structure so that it meets an accepted quality standard and continues to function properly (Ogbu, 2017). Besides physical assets like concrete structure restoration and refurbishing, maintenance services also encompass intangible operations that are ephemeral and are linked to both manufacturing and consumer events (Ahn & Kim, 2011). The excessive use of public housing, which is densely populated and has several occupants, adds to rapid degradation due to wear and strain (Estelle, 2009; Oche et al., 2015; Amusan et. Al., 2021). The argument then becomes, what are the maintenance operations in public accommodation? According to Rydell (2005), maintenance culture is a dwelling management element offered by management to inhabitants within or beyond homes, public amenities, and associated facilities in an effort to improve housing conditions and generate good attitudes about their housing. According to Cooper (2015), maintenance culture entails taking scientific and administrative steps to ensure that the facility meets appropriate performance standards. Maintenance culture includes actions that mitigate building degradation, reduce failures, and decrease safety issues (Flores-Colen & De Brito, 2010). Hence, "maintenance culture" seeks to keep the property price stable and the living conditions in the building comfortable (Hills & Worthing, 2006). Similarly, Olanrewaju and Abdul-Aziz (2014) claimed that maintenance varies for each structure. Maintenance works, whether critical, immediate, or regular, is determined by the needs of the occupants, the complexity of the structure, the reasons of malfunction, and the length of the facility. Most maintenance service organizations strive for functional performance and service quality (Pozdena, 1988; Wilhelmsson, 2008). As a consequence, it is critical to have a well maintenance process, as well as dedication from all essential actors, to guarantee that the building functions well and meets the occupants' expectations.

### ***Determinants of Maintenance Culture in Public Housing***

The criteria that may be applied to forecast the culture of government housing maintenance from the view of occupants are not obvious in the existing research. The present state of knowledge seems to describe the broad causes that lead to a weak housing maintenance attitude, particularly from the managerial or state standpoint. Accordingly, Asabere (2007) and Amusan et. al. (2021) explains public housing's weak maintenance culture to the payments of constant rentals whose value falls over time. This has an impact on the total budgets given to institutional dwelling units' maintenance. Lack of rules on home upkeep, inadequate finances contributing to deferred repair, and negative perceptions towards public property are all contributing causes (Arnott & Shevyakhova, 2014; Dziadosz & Meszek, 2015). According to Olandapo (2006), the majority of renters had a clear understanding of the purpose of maintenance and a strong feeling of commitment to public house maintenance. This level of knowledge and awareness might be due to the fact that the renters were professionally knowledgeable, with degrees extending from first degrees to doctorates in numerous professions. Hence, tenants agreed on the priority of competing maintenance requests. It will be important in scheming to enhance the lifetime of public housing units to be able to forecast the culture of maintenance of public housing schemes by a resident.

The prolonged importance of public housing as a building model is dependent on a variety of elements, one of which is the capacity to preserve the residential units through proper maintenance practises, notably by the tenants (Makinde, 2016). The characteristics of present public housing units in many developing nations show that many are in a negative state and depressed (Kangwa & Olubodun, 2004; Hui, 2005). This is attributed to an unsuccessful house maintenance culture among residents and homeowners as well as a lack of maintenance strategies (Holm, 2000; Kangwa & Olubodun, 2007; Lee & Scott, 2009; Lai & Pang, 2010). However, the existing knowledge is divided in terms of the elements that account for the negative culture of government housing maintenance. This considers housing policies offered too common rather than specific. As a result, much earlier research in this area has been superficial and irrelevant in scope and applicability (Gilbert, 2003; Kangwa & Olubodun, 2007; Mohit et al., 2010).

## **Methods**

### ***Study Area***

The study was conducted in Kurunegala District, which is the capital of the North Western Province in Sri Lanka. As per the urban population share statistics of Sri Lanka, Kurunegala District (Urban population share is 13%) is identified as a moderately urbanized district in Sri Lanka (Weeraratne, 2016). The public housing which are located in Kurunegala district, belong to the Central Government and Provincial Council, while it is classified as "Scheduled Quarters" or "General Service Quarters." All scheduled quarters are those assigned to a particular post or grade within a ministry or department, and all general service quarters are allocated for the purpose of fulfilling the housing needs of all the officers who are not serving in posts or grades that are entitled to scheduled quarters. 131 public housings are located within the Municipal Council limits and 528 are located outside the municipal border. The district was considered for this investigation because it contains a good combination of public housing structures created by the Sri Lankan government and owned and maintained by state agencies.

### ***Population and Sampling Procedure***

The population of the study was 659 respondents who were government employees occupied in public housing units of eleven government institutions in Kurunegala district. Further, the target population was government workers, except minor officers, who are occupied in labour quarters, barracks, temporary buildings etc. A non-probability sampling method was used for this study as the probability of selecting members of the sample from the population is unknown. According to the sampling method, it principally insists on the convenience sampling method, which is a non-probability procedure where individuals are selected due to their convenient approachability. Accordingly, 243 public housing units participated in the study, which gave a response rate of 37%.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

The survey approach was used in the study. Data was acquired from primary sources using systematic, closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was comprised of three sections. Section one captures the demographic profile of the respondents, including ethnicity, education, age, occupation, tenancy period, and so on. Section two is to identify the nature of the existing maintenance culture, including the level of the maintenance, time period of maintenance, type of maintenance, and source of funds for the maintenance. Section three of the questionnaire consists of ordinal data for the Likert Scale under the three main variables, including socio-cultural perception, proxemics, and motivation. Secondary data was collected from relevant institutions such as Kurunegala Municipal Council, Kurunegala Pradeshiya Sabha, etc. Data analysis used descriptive and inferential methods, supplemented by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26. Frequencies, percentages, averages, and standard deviations were all used in

descriptive statistics. Non-Parametric Tests based on with one sample Chi-square test for each categorical variable were used in inferential statistics.

## Results and Discussion

### *Profile of the Respondents*

Table 01 indicates that demographic characteristics of the sample. Ethnicity wise majority of people are Sinhalese it represents 48%. In age group wise 36 – 41 age group is majority of the sample. Majority of the participants had a post graduate level and it is 37%. Most of the respondents had admin or management level occupation and it covers 63%. In addition to that 72% tenants had 4-6 years tenancy period.

**Table 01: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Variable	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Sinhalese	117	48
	Tamils	58	24
	Moors	45	18
	Indian Tamils	2	1
	Malays	19	8
	Burghers and Europeans	2	1
	Other Groups	-	-
<b>Age</b>	18-23	4	2
	24-29	62	25
	30-35	52	21
	36-41	72	30
	>42	53	22
<b>Education Level</b>	Ordinary Level	10	4
	Advanced Level	45	18
	Graduate	82	34
	Post Graduate	89	37
	Professional	17	7
<b>Occupation</b>	General Staff	21	9
	Executive/ Technical Officers	41	17
	Admin / Management	152	63
	SLAS/ Director	29	11
<b>Tenancy Period</b>	0-3	39	15
	4-6	174	72
	7-10	28	12
	>10	2	1

### *Nature of Existing Maintenance Culture*

The results revealed that the majority of respondents (51%) claimed that maintenance was completed more than one year ago, while the majority of respondents (61.5%) noted that maintenance was small or limited to colouring only. Furthermore, the results revealed that just 5% of respondents reported that they had performed maintenance throughout their stay. The study showed that there is poor housing maintenance in public housing, a minority of tenants and owners engage in maintenance activities, and there is insufficient funding allocated for maintenance work. This suggests that current policies and legal frameworks are insufficient to improve housing maintenance in public housing in Sri Lanka. The findings supported the findings of Powell (1995) and Cattle (2021) who found that delaying and failing to respond to maintenance activities causes serious maintenance problems and the deterioration of public housing.

### *Tenants' Perception on the Attributes of the Public Housing Maintenance Culture*

According to the study's inferential analysis, the reliability test was carried out to assess the strength of the data and to establish if the elements were connected to the study. The reliability test result found that the Cronbach's Alpha for all variables was outstanding, with a total score of 0.956 (95%). The mean response value demonstrates the adequacy of the variables that have been chosen. Item data show that the mean of each item is greater than 3.5, with an average mean of 3.96, which is 3.5 higher than would be desirable for a confirmatory study. A standard deviation of less than 1.0 for the variables indicates consistency (Refer Table 02).

**Table 02: Item Statistics**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>Socio Cultural Perception</b>			
Understand Responsibility	3.90	.809	243
Respect term and conditions	3.96	.931	243
Deepest courtesy to repair	3.89	.927	243
Instructions given to family	3.91	.968	243
Understand the significance	4.22	.770	243
<b>Proxemics</b>			
Enhance social Interactions	4.19	.820	243
Cultural Values	4.21	.844	243
Self-Regulations of Family	4.00	.960	243
Take care Maintenance costs	3.72	1.077	243
Holding Dignity as a government servant	3.74	.840	243
<b>Motivation</b>			
Satisfaction when compared to past residences	3.86	.659	243
Closer to their children's School	3.71	.839	243
Satisfaction of their location and condition of the quarters	4.07	.845	243
Rental is reasonable when compared to market rates	4.00	.881	243
Accomplish the self-motivation activities	4.02	.798	243

According to the ANOVA result, the P-Value is lower at the 0.05 level. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean of the various socio-cultural perception, proxemics, and motivation components, implying strong evidence against the null hypothesis. The P-Value for all categorical variables is less than 0.05, as per the results of the One-Sample Chi-Square test. All null hypotheses have been denied by the test. The result implies that each independent variable and the dependent variable have a significant relationship. All categorical factors, including socio-cultural perception, proxemics impact, and motivation, could be applied to assess the dependent variable, public housing maintenance culture. Moreover, as per the ANOVA and Non-Parametric Test, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is being rejected where there is no strong relationship between socio-cultural perception, proxemics, motivation, and housing maintenance culture for the maintenance of public housing. Therefore, it is accepted that the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) of the case study shows that there is a strong relationship between socio-cultural perception, proxemics, motivation, and housing maintenance culture for the maintenance of public housing.

However, descriptive and inferential analysis revealed that sociocultural perception, proxemics, and motivation variables have a strong influence on improving housing maintenance culture in the Kurunegala district, and all sub variables are at an acceptable level among respondents under the three main variables. This suggests that public housing tenants are willing to assist in maintenance operations. This can only be accomplished by developing a legal blueprint and regulations that direct tenants in this direction, as well as by implementing preventive

maintenance indicators aimed at limiting housing degradation by incorporating permanent staff that perform standard and timely monitoring of housing conditions and repairs in close collaboration with tenants. These findings confirm prior comments by Onibokun (1973) and Oladapo (2006) that appropriate and satisfying housing comprises, among other things, the aspects of the dwelling itself, the area in which the housing is located, and the maintenance culture under which it is preserved. Furthermore, this verifies Wordsworth (2001) assessment that delays, less motivation in responding to housing maintenance demands result in a bad culture of public housing unit upkeep.

## Conclusion

The study is mainly focused on investigating the factors influencing the housing maintenance culture in public housing. The article presents the findings of a questionnaire study of 243 residents in 11 public housing estates in Kurunegala District, Sri Lanka. The study found that socio-cultural perception, proxemics, and motivation variables are highly influential in enhancing the housing maintenance culture in public housing in Kurunegala district, and all variables are at an accepted level among the respondents. The findings reveal that the majority of the tenants had good knowledge and desire to follow the maintenance rules, as well as a strong level of responsibility for the upkeep of their dwellings.

The government should evaluate its property management and maintenance organisational strategy to guarantee that the maintenance operation is devoid of bureaucratic features. To maintain efficiency and effectiveness, the present residential maintenance institutional strategy must be in sync with present consumer dynamics and expectations. The state should make certain that the ministry has an appropriate institutional culture for successful public housing upkeep. The institutional culture should be assessed on a regular basis to ensure that bureaucracy and red noise are limited and work targets are carried out as planned. An impartial body must often examine the corporate culture and structural policies.

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