

ABSTRACT

Studies across the globe, dealing with socio-psychological impacts of high-rise housing identify behavioural problems and impersonal social relations amongst its residents. In spite of such socio-psychological concern, India, presently with 18.78 million urban housing shortages (in 2012), and an expected 600 million urban population by 2031, has perhaps no other option but to encourage high-rise housing. With a promise to offer a heightened living experience, such forms of isolated high-rise towers or group housing complexes are becoming an inevitable part of urban India. Thus to ensure a better living environment in these high-rises, this research tries to understand the impact of built environment (if any) on residents' social relations. It evaluates residential social cohesion (social relation of the residents) and identifies the role of interactional spaces (the spaces of interaction) in strengthening social cohesion, created through day to day activities and opportunities of a chance encounter within high-rise group housing complexes for the chosen city, Kolkata, in India. It examines some of the indoor (floor lobby-corridor and ground floor lobby) and outdoor (park-playground-common terraces, street, tot-lot) interactional spaces through objective and perceived attributes of the physical environment and also the types of use of those spaces. Incorporating both, the researcher's perspective (through behaviour observation, on field inventory, space syntax analysis), as well as the users' perspectives (user perception), it achieves unbiased evaluation. The analyses primarily rely on the opinions of the head of 652 households from fifteen housing complexes. Later, for measuring residential social cohesion from the perception of the households in a high-rise housing complex of India, following confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), this research identifies three dimensions: Sense of belonging, Neighbourliness and Neighbour annoyance. Subsequently, with the help of hierarchical linear models (HLM), it identifies how the significant attributes of the physical environment and use of the interactional spaces are associated with the dimensions of residential social cohesion. The result shows that the arrangement and use of the streets and tot-lots contribute more than any other spaces. Further, it indicates that more than actual use, the opportunities of a chance encounter and opportunities of use of the spaces contribute more in social cohesion. The findings of the research would likely to help the architects, urban planners and policy makers to adopt a more user-oriented approach in design and policy formulation in future.

Keywords: *High-rise, Housing complex, Interactional space, Residential social cohesion*

