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HOUSING SATISFACTION AS A MEDIATING FACTOR BETWEEN HOUSING PROVISION AND QUALITY OF LIFE: A CASE STUDY**Thandeka Nyangule***iYunivesithi Sisulu University, Butterworth Campus, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa**E-mail: thnyangule@wsu.ac.za**Received 18 May 2026; accepted 17 August 2026; published 30 September 2026*

Abstract. Adequate housing is a fundamental human right, yet the quality and satisfaction levels associated with Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) housing in South Africa remain a subject of ongoing concern. Despite government efforts to address housing backlogs, many beneficiaries continue to experience substandard living conditions that compromise their quality of life. This study investigated housing satisfaction as a mediating factor between housing provision and quality of life. A qualitative research approach, underpinned by a case study design, was employed. A purposive sample of six municipal officials from Mnquma Local Municipality participated in the study. Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed throughout the research process. Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability measures. Six themes emerged from the findings: housing quality and structural deficiencies; infrastructure and service delivery challenges; safety and social environment concerns; governance and institutional constraints; community participation and beneficiary involvement; and the broader relationship between housing and quality of life. The findings revealed persistent structural defects, inconsistent service delivery, safety concerns, weak institutional capacity, and limited community participation as key factors undermining housing satisfaction and quality of life among beneficiaries. Integrated, community-centred approaches that encompass construction quality enforcement, strengthened governance, reliable infrastructure, and meaningful participation are essential to improving RDP housing outcomes. Housing provision must be complemented by broader socioeconomic interventions to achieve sustainable human development.

Keywords: RDP housing; housing satisfaction; quality of life; service delivery; Mnquma Local Municipality

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1. Introduction

Everyone agrees that housing is an essential human right and a key component of socioeconomic growth. The state's commitment to addressing the injustices of apartheid is reflected in South Africa's constitution, which guarantees access to decent housing (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was implemented as a comprehensive policy framework to address housing backlogs and improve living conditions in previously underprivileged areas following the democratic transition in 1994 (Amoah et al., 2022). Under the RDP, the South African government has provided millions of subsidised housing units over the past thirty years (Mosala, 2022). Even as this accomplishment is a significant step toward social and spatial change, there are still concerns about how effectively these housing measures would improve beneficiaries' quality of life. Research indicates issues with housing quality, location, and sustainability are often overlooked by the emphasis on quantitative delivery (Huchzermeyer, 2021; Moamba & Mamokhere, 2025).

Beneficiaries have often gained access to formal housing, but they still face obstacles such as poor construction, inadequate infrastructure, and limited job opportunities (Zondi & Haruna, 2025). In rural and semi-rural communities, where structural differences and service delivery limitations persist, these problems are most noticeable (Sekoboto & Landman, 2019). Such a context is evident in Mnquma Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape, which is marked by high unemployment, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure. The relationship between housing availability and quality of life is complicated (Palimaru et al., 2021) and cannot be fully represented by quantitative statistics alone. Although the quantity of housing provided is a crucial indicator of development, it does not accurately reflect beneficiaries' actual experiences (Mnguni, 2020). The extent to which residents believe their housing conditions meet their requirements and expectations is known as housing satisfaction (Mekebo & Dong, 2021), and it is increasingly recognised as a crucial factor in determining well-being.

The main aim of the study was to explore housing satisfaction as a mediating factor between housing provision and quality of life. This was a case study based in Mnquma Local Municipality, in the New Rest township in Butterworth. The study aimed to answer the following research question: What are the housing conditions and service delivery factors that influence housing satisfaction among RDP beneficiaries in Mnquma Local Municipality? How do RDP houses satisfy beneficiaries' physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualisation needs as explained by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs? How do beneficiaries perceive the adequacy of housing quality, infrastructure, neighbourhood environment, and municipal services in their RDP settlements? How can the principles of Residential Satisfaction Theory and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs be integrated to explain the relationship between housing provision, housing satisfaction, and quality of life? And, what conceptual model can be developed to enhance housing satisfaction and improve the quality of life of RDP beneficiaries in Mnquma Local Municipality?

2. Theoretical framework

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Residential Satisfaction Theory was used in the study to explain how housing satisfaction affects the quality of life among recipients of Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses in Mnquma Local Municipality. Maslow's theory was reinforced by Residential Satisfaction Theory; both theories played a significant role in the understanding of how beneficiaries assess their housing circumstances and how these circumstances affect their well-being.

According to Mohit and Raja (2014), the Residential Satisfaction Theory describes how people evaluate their living conditions based on their wants, expectations, and personal experiences. According to the hypothesis, when beneficiaries' expectations align with their actual housing conditions, they are satisfied; when they do not, they become dissatisfied. The Residential Satisfaction Theory acknowledges both empirical and subjective aspects of housing pleasure (Mohit & Raja, 2014). Housing quality, infrastructure, service accessibility and location are objective aspects; comfort, safety, dignity, and emotional attachment to the home are subjective qualities (Das, 2026).

Structural challenges, inadequate infrastructure, subpar service delivery, and constrained living space may lead recipients of RDP housing to feel unhappy even when they are obtaining formal housing. Recent research indicates that residential happiness is also influenced by municipal accountability and responsiveness to governance (Emami & Sadeghlou, 2021; Ibem & Aduwo, 2023). It explains how beneficiaries' beliefs and experiences affect their overall satisfaction with RDP housing. The theory is relevant to our study.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs explains how housing affects human well-being and offers a more comprehensive developmental perspective (Trivedi & Mehta, 2019). Maslow argues that human needs are organised in a hierarchy, starting with physiological needs and progressing to safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation (Ghaleb, 2024). Secure, stable housing promotes safety and mental well-being, while also satisfying physiological

needs by providing shelter and protection. Through home ownership and community integration, housing also fosters a sense of social belonging, dignity, and self-worth. However, these demands are undermined, and quality of life is adversely affected by poor housing, dangerous areas, and inadequate infrastructure. According to recent research, poor living conditions hinder social and psychological growth (Kurniawati et al., 2025; Palimaru et al., 2023).

The study conceptualises housing satisfaction as a mediating factor between housing provision and quality of life through the integration of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Residential Satisfaction Theory. Maslow's theory describes how housing conditions affect broader developmental outcomes, whereas Residential Satisfaction Theory explains how beneficiaries assess those conditions. When combined, these theories offer a useful conceptual framework for comprehending the connection between RDP beneficiaries' quality of life and housing satisfaction in Mnquma Local Municipality.

3. Literature review

Physical, social and institutional factors all affect the multifaceted concept of housing satisfaction (Moolla et al., 2011). Satisfaction in low-cost housing environments can be affected by the development's location, service accessibility, and building quality. Poor construction quality has repeatedly been found to be a key cause of dissatisfaction in empirical studies. The durability and usefulness of houses are compromised by faults such as cracked walls, leaking roofs, and poor finishes (Nyakala et al., 2021). In addition to impairing physical comfort, these problems impose an additional financial burden on beneficiaries who must make repairs.

Another important factor influencing housing satisfaction is access to basic services. Although access to electricity, water, and sanitary facilities is supposed to be provided by RDP housing, the reliability and quality of these services often vary. Inadequate sanitation systems, poorly maintained infrastructure, and disruptions in the water supply all considerably lower satisfaction ratings (Moolla et al., 2011). Another important factor is location. Many RDP housing estates are situated on the outskirts of cities, far from social services and employment opportunities. This geographical inequality restricts economic mobility and fosters dissatisfaction (Visagie et al., 2024).

Physical, psychological, social and environmental well-being are all included in the complex concept of quality of life (Palimaru et al., 2023). Housing affects social relationships, safety, and health; it is a major factor in determining the quality of life. By lowering exposure to environmental risks and providing a stable living environment, adequate housing can enhance health outcomes. Creating a feeling of safety and community can also improve psychological well-being. Poor housing conditions, however, can have the opposite effect, increasing social exclusion, tension, and anxiety (Sakariyau et al., 2023).

Although the RDP housing program has played a significant role in reducing housing backlogs, its effectiveness remains debatable. Although the program has made formal housing more accessible, it has drawn criticism for problems with sustainability, location, and quality. According to studies, many RDP homes have poor infrastructure and structural flaws that compromise their long-term viability (Amoah et al., 2022). Furthermore, the remote locations of many housing developments limit access to economic opportunities, which reduces the program's ability to reduce poverty. These challenges are exacerbated in the Eastern Cape by institutional problems and resource limitations, resulting in unequal housing outcomes. There is limited qualitative research on beneficiaries' lived experiences in rural municipalities, despite a large body of research on RDP housing. As a result, by offering a thorough qualitative examination of housing satisfaction and quality of life in Mnquma Local Municipality, this study fills this gap.

4. Research methodology

The qualitative research methodology was used in this study and was well-suited to examining complex social phenomena and understanding participants' viewpoints. To gather detailed information about housing satisfaction and quality of life, a case study design was used. The study focused on an in-depth investigation of housing satisfaction and quality of life within a specific context, namely RDP housing beneficiaries in MLM. Data were collected from municipal officials directly involved in housing delivery, allowing for a detailed exploration of implementation processes, governance practices, and perceived outcomes. The case study design was therefore suitable because it enabled a comprehensive examination of a contemporary social phenomenon within its real-life setting, while capturing the complexity of housing-related experiences and service delivery dynamics. Semi-structured interviews with local governments involved in housing delivery were used to gather data. These interviews provided insights into perceived results, implementation difficulties, and governance procedures. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data, identifying, categorising, and interpreting common themes. The study ensured credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability through rigorous methodological procedures.

5. Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Housing quality and structural deficiencies

Participants frequently brought up concerns about the physical condition of RDP homes. Problems, including poor materials, structural cracks, and insufficient space, were often raised. One participant noted: *"Many of the houses that were built initially had defects. You find cracks in the walls, leaking roofs, and sometimes doors that don't close properly. These issues affect how people feel about their homes."* Another participant emphasised: *"The size of the houses is also a concern. Families are growing, but the houses remain small. People end up extending them informally, which creates other problems."*

These findings highlight how a key factor in determining satisfaction is the quality of living conditions. The durability and functionality of standard homes are compromised by poor construction, which makes recipients unhappy. This result is consistent with Nyakala et al. (2021), who contend that subpar materials and shoddy construction are significant causes of dissatisfaction in RDP homes. In a similar vein, Amoah et al. (2022) note that structural flaws make affordable housing less sustainable in the long run. According to the Residential Satisfaction Theory (Mohit & Raja, 2014), an inconsistency between expectations and actual living circumstances can lead to discontent. In this instance, recipients' expectations for secure, long-term housing are not fully met, resulting in unfavourable evaluations. Poor housing quality is increasingly associated with social instability and psychological stress, according to recent research. Recurrent structural defects are linked to worry, instability, and a decline in public trust in institutions (Moamba et al., 2025). Ibem and Aduwo (2023) contend that the level of trust by the people in government service delivery is weakened when they are unhappy with the quality of their dwelling.

Theme 2: Infrastructure and service delivery challenges

Participants noted that access to essential services has improved, but they also highlighted that quality and reliability remain major issues. One participant stated, *"Yes, people now have access to water and electricity, but the problem is consistency. Water is not always available, and sometimes the infrastructure is not maintained properly."* Another added: *"Roads are another issue. In some areas, they are not properly developed, and this affects access to services like clinics and schools."*

These quotes demonstrate that service dependability is just as crucial as access alone in determining housing satisfaction. These findings support Moolla et al. (2011), who contend that service dependability is a major factor influencing home satisfaction. In a similar vein, Mutyambizi et al. (2020) stress that the advantages of housing provision are compromised by poor infrastructure. According to Maslow, the extent to which housing contributes

to well-being is limited, as inconsistent services affect both physiological and safety needs (Ghaleb, 2024). Integrated human settlements are more important than isolated housing delivery, according to recent research. Visagie et al. (2024) assert that even when housing is provided, socioeconomic marginalisation persists in underdeveloped municipalities. Similarly, Kurniawati et al. (2022) discovered that emotional health and community trust are adversely affected by infrastructure instability. Maslow's thesis goes on to explain that poor infrastructure limits the quality of life by compromising safety and the ability to meet physiological needs.

Theme 3: Safety, security, and social environment

Housing satisfaction and quality of life are significantly impacted by safety. A participant explained: *"Some of these areas are not very safe. Crime is a problem, and the houses themselves are not always secure. This makes people feel uncomfortable in their own homes."* Another participant noted, *"Even though people have houses, if they do not feel safe, it affects their overall well-being. Safety is very important."*

These answers show that home satisfaction encompasses the broader social environment as well as physical structures. These findings align with Aigbavboa and Thwala (2012) claim that safety is a major factor in home satisfaction. According to Wood et al. (2021), psychological well-being is adversely affected by insecurity. Theoretically, safety is emphasised as a basic human need in Maslow's Hierarchy. Higher-order needs such as esteem and belonging cannot be met when safety is jeopardised. The relationship between home conditions and mental health is being highlighted more and more in recent research. Unsafe living settings are linked to long-term stress and social disengagement, according to Palimaru et al. (2023). It indicates that community safety conditions and quality of life are inextricably linked. This perspective is supported by Maslow's paradigm, which views safety as a fundamental human need.

Theme 4: Governance, monitoring, and institutional constraints

Participants raised concerns about governance, including poor institutional responsiveness and insufficient oversight. One participant stated: *"Monitoring and evaluation are not always effective. Sometimes issues are reported, but they take a long time to be addressed."* Another added: *"There are capacity challenges within the municipality. We do not always have enough resources to respond to all the issues."*

These quotes highlight structural issues that affect the execution and long-term viability of housing initiatives. These findings are consistent with Nyakala et al. (2021), who state that a significant barrier to housing supply is inadequate municipal capacity. In a similar vein, Mhlongo et al. (2022) emphasise how institutional inefficiencies compromise the efficacy of programs. This view holds that governance problems create a gap between policy goals and actual circumstances, leading to dissatisfaction.

Theme 5: Community participation and beneficiary involvement

One common concern was the lack of community involvement. A participant noted: *"Community involvement is not always strong. People are informed about projects, but they are not always involved in decision-making."* Another participant explained: *"When communities are involved, they take ownership of the projects. But when they are excluded, dissatisfaction increases."*

These findings imply that involvement is a key factor in determining housing satisfaction. Zonke and Matsiliza (2015), who contend that participatory approaches improve satisfaction and sustainability, support this result. In a similar vein, Aigbavboa and Thwala (2013) highlight that community involvement enhances alignment between housing provision and local requirements.

Theme 6: Housing and quality of life

While acknowledging that RDP housing has improved living conditions, participants highlighted that difficulties persist. One participant stated, *"People's lives have improved because they now have shelter, but there are still challenges. Housing alone cannot solve all problems."* Another added: *"Quality of life depends on many things: employment, services, and safety. Housing is just one part of it."*

These quotes underscore the multifaceted nature of quality of life. Palimaru et al. (2023), who define quality of life as embracing numerous characteristics beyond housing, concur with this finding. The necessity of integrated approaches to human settlements is also emphasised by Visagie et al. (2024).

6. Recommendations

The Department of Human Settlements should enforce stricter quality control measures during RDP house construction, including independent post-construction inspections to identify and rectify structural defects before handover to beneficiaries. Mquma Local Municipality should establish dedicated infrastructure maintenance teams to ensure reliable water, electricity, and road services, recognising that consistent service delivery is fundamental to housing satisfaction and overall well-being. Collaborative partnerships among the municipality, the South African Police Service, and community structures should be prioritised to address crime and improve the social environment in RDP settlements. Municipal capacity should be strengthened through targeted training, adequate resourcing, and effective monitoring and evaluation systems to improve responsiveness to reported housing defects. Structured participatory frameworks should be institutionalised to ensure beneficiaries are actively involved in housing planning and decision-making, thereby fostering ownership and long-term satisfaction. Housing delivery should be complemented by employment creation, social services, and community development initiatives, acknowledging that quality of life extends beyond physical shelter.

7. Conclusion

The main aim of the study was to explore housing satisfaction as a mediating factor between housing provision and quality of life. This was a case study based in Mquma Local Municipality, in the New Rest township in Butterworth. To achieve this aim, the study sought to determine the factors influencing housing satisfaction, examine residents' perceptions of housing infrastructure and services, assess the relationship between housing satisfaction and quality of life, and identify measures for improvement. The findings revealed that a combination of housing quality, access to basic services, neighbourhood safety, governance practices, and community participation influences housing satisfaction. Participants perceived infrastructure and service delivery as inconsistent, with structural defects, inadequate maintenance, and limited economic opportunities negatively affecting satisfaction levels and quality of life. The study further established that housing satisfaction is an important mechanism by which housing provision contributes to broader well-being outcomes. The novelty of the study lies in its integration of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Residential Satisfaction Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of how housing conditions influence both satisfaction and quality of life within a rural municipal context, while also proposing an integrated conceptual model linking housing provision, housing satisfaction, and quality of life. The study was limited by its focus on a single municipality, the relatively small qualitative sample, and the reliance on participants' perceptions, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research should test the proposed model quantitatively across different municipalities, conduct comparative studies between rural and urban RDP settlements, and employ longitudinal designs to examine how housing satisfaction and quality of life evolve.

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Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to ethical and confidentiality considerations. The raw data are securely held by Mr Maxhobandile Ndamase, Head of Department, School of Management and Public Administration, Walter Sisulu University, Butterworth Campus. Researchers interested in accessing the data may contact Mr Ndamase at nndamase@wsu.ac.za or by telephone at +27 47 401 6396. Access to the data will be considered upon reasonable request and subject to applicable ethical requirements.

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