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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# TENANTS' EXPERIENCES REGARDING SATISFACTION WITH EXISTING COMPLAINT HANDLING MECHANISMS IN LANDLORD MANAGED APARTMENTS IN KAMPALA

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### ABSTRACT

This study assessed the tenants' experiences regarding satisfaction with existing complaint handling mechanisms in landlord managed apartments in Najjera, Kampala City. The study employed a case study strategy and it was backed up with both qualitative and quantitative research approaches on a sample size of 91 respondents including tenants, landlords and landlords' representatives. The data was collected with the help of questionnaires (25 tenants and 25 landlords), interviews (20 tenants and 15 landlords) and focus group discussion targeting 6 participants. Analysis was through thematic categorisation, MS Excel and SPSS packages. This paper categorises tenant experiences regarding satisfaction with complaints handling mechanisms through complaints handling mechanisms used, modes of lodging complaints, duration of responses to complaints raised and timeliness of feedback mechanisms. Much as there was a notably high level of tenant satisfaction with apartment features, neighbourhood features and management factors, landlords address raised tenant issues and they ask for feedback from tenants to evaluate the effectiveness of the resolutions. There were obvious reservations among landlords regarding the legitimacy of complaints raised with lacking fairness, necessitating some complaints not to be attended to. This paper recommends efficient property management practices where landlords should adopt appropriate measures in order to improve and maintain their property in a habitable state through improving maintenance by engaging in planned maintenance programme; periodic and preventive maintenance schedules.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tenants experience greater externalized locus of control than house owners do, as tenants have more influence on their housing environment. It is well acknowledged that tenants typically cannot alter or modify the structural characteristics and are subject to being removed at the end of the tenancy term (Bell, 1984; Turner, Davies, & Marquardt, 2017). LeBrasseur, Blackford, and Whissell (1988) explain that, a locus of control approach is a measure in weighing the differences in residential satisfaction of tenants in landlord managed apartments.

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There is therefore a dependent relationship between tenants and landlords where tenants are bound by the contract while landlords are to deliver promised services to the property in order to sustain their relationship (Pina et al., 2017). Complaint handling serves as a cogent remedy for tenant issues arising due to dissatisfactions regarding service delivery by landlords. Tenants complain when they experience a service performance that falls below their expectations and the consequent dissatisfaction they feel (Ongudi, 2008). Understanding tenants complaining behaviour requires a continuous assessment of negative feedback and criticism from tenants, landlords must carry out analysis but should not contact dissatisfied tenants directly to ascertain their grouse against the landlord. In Uganda, professional management of rented residential properties is not predominant, yet there is an increasing demand for apartments and other rentals because of the

increasing population growth in central Uganda, and particularly greater Kampala metropolitan area.

This combined with common attitudes of landlords against contracting professional property management services leaves a lacuna as far as professional handling of tenants' complaints is concerned. Edington (1997) was an early proponent of the need for tenant-focused property management, eschewing the "old way" of treating tenants as a source of "upwardly mobile income" and recognizing instead that "it is the tenants that are mobile and that their custom must be earned." (Danielle C Sanderson & Edwards, 2013; Danielle Claire Sanderson & Edwards, 2016). In this way, tenant satisfaction with prevailing complaints handling mechanisms is paramount in order to improve landlord tenant relationship and eventual occupancy rates of apartment blocks. Existing studies have focused on quantitative assessments of tenant satisfaction with particular components of the housing premises but devoid of an in-depth qualitative understanding of the tenant satisfaction phenomenon. The next section provides a detailed literature review of the key concepts of the study.

## Literature review

**Tenant satisfaction:** Studies of peoples' satisfaction with their residential environment have shown complex patterns of relationship. Tenant satisfaction is commonly hinged on physical components of shelter, relationships with neighbourhood factors and management factors and systems (Mohit, Ibrahim, & Rashid, 2010). Based on their respective life background and expectation, different groups and social classes have different living environment perception and satisfaction (Kangjuan, Wang, & Wei, 2010). Ogutu (2013) alternatively promotes the concept of user satisfaction by incorporating four interactive subsystems: the tenant, the dwelling, the environment, and the management subsystems. The concept of housing satisfaction has been used as an ad hoc evaluative measure for judging the success of housing developments constructed by both the public and private sectors. In this case, satisfaction among people is regularly perceived as a process of evaluation between what was received and what was expected (Klemetti et al., 2015).

Lu (1999) recognises resident satisfaction as a complex construct which, is affected by a variety of environmental and socio-demographic variables among which include gender, age, family size, educational level, monthly family income, employment statute, length of residency, and socioeconomic status. Studies of residential satisfaction have disaggregated the concept majorly in two categories; those that consider residential satisfaction as a predictor of behaviour (Kim, Francesca, & Preston, 2005; Mohit & Azim, 2012, 2018), or residential satisfaction as a criterion of housing quality (Amérigo & Aragonés, 1997; Lawton, 1980). Studies based on residential satisfaction as a predictor of behaviour assume that satisfaction with existing housing determines behaviour of the resident in terms of making changes to the housing unit or the decision to move to another housing unit. The basis of this assumption is that differences in the existing housing and the actual housing needs and preferences of the dwellers will result in either making changes to existing housing or move to a housing unit that meets their actual housing needs and preferences (Anderson, 2002). On the other hand, studies that employ residential satisfaction as a measure of housing quality

use housing unit features, services and facilities provided in housing area and the housing environment to determine the degree to which a person is satisfied with the existing housing unit (Aragonés, 1997). Building quality can be appreciated in relation to quality of space, ventilation and lighting in common areas (Frontczak et al., 2012; Jain et al., 2020), neighbourhood factors in relation to children playing spaces, cleanliness of corridors, stair cases and common areas and waste management (Onyango, 2010; Sam, Zain, & Saadatian, 2012). Tenants however, occasionally lack a good attitude towards caring for hygiene and their mentality of expecting someone else to clean up after them contributes to the bulk of the problem, being not very satisfied with the security and crime prevention features in their neighbourhoods and as well as management elements have a great bearing on the relationship between tenants and landlords and thus satisfaction of the tenants though in most cases response to maintenance requests is never satisfactory (Vera-Toscano & Ateca-Amestoy, 2008).

A bunch of authors, especially those that are quantitatively focused suggest that residential satisfaction is a function of factors related to the occupant's dwelling, services within the dwelling area, relationship with neighbours and the location of the dwelling unit. Furthermore, satisfaction depends on beliefs and opinions that the occupant entertains in respect to the housing unit and which are not connected with its physical characteristics (Kelelew, 2015; E. W. Morris & Winter, 1975). Other researchers measured housing well-being using a composite sum of satisfaction with dwelling unit features, for example, the number of rooms per family and the possession of a private bathroom and kitchen (Wells, 2000). On the other hand, Clarke, Fenton, Holmans, and Jones (2008) identified dwelling types, property size, internal and outdoor space, kitchens and bathrooms, neighbourhood parking and external appearance as factors important to today's households. Varady and Carrozza (2000), stresses that residential satisfaction is related to satisfaction with dwelling unit (that is physical aspects and personal preferences), satisfaction with services provided, and satisfaction with the neighbourhood and area, which also covers the location specific aspects.

Based on research carried out in Brazil by Pina et al. (2017) the main factors related to housing satisfaction included communal services such as roads, sewer system, and basic utilities within the housing area. Cao, Handy, & Mokhtarian, (2006) studied the real estate market in Austin Texas and found that housing demand is highly influenced by proximity to transportation and public facilities rather than merely based on physical factors. Therefore, physical aspects of the housing area such as common areas, ventilation and lighting, and orientation of windows within the housing areas also contribute towards overall housing satisfaction. Vera-Toscano & Ateca-Amestoy, (2008) in their study examined housing satisfaction on the basis of individual and household attributes, housing characteristics, and social interactions with one's residential neighbourhood. However, to question the validity of the residential satisfaction concept, partly on the grounds that expressed satisfaction is wholly dependent on the tenants' expectations. Distinct from this is the critique that the degree of satisfaction expressed by a tenant will be dependent on a range of factors, many of which may be unconnected with the practical performance of the landlord or neighbourhood in question. This paper focuses on residential satisfaction as influenced by tenants' expectations with the state of the

dwelling unit, available maintenance system, neighbourhood environment. Eventually, the expectations of tenants are carefully corroborated with those of the property proprietors to aid an eventual understanding of their feasibility, and effectiveness of complaints handling process when disputes occur.

**Tenant complaint handling:** A complaint is simply a statement that a condition is unsatisfactory on the part of the disgruntled party. A statement of dissatisfaction can either be volunteered or requested (via surveys). In residential rented buildings, especially apartment blocks, occupants volunteer complaints to building management through formal complaint handling processes or informal interactions with their managers (Read, 2003). The reasons an occupant might volunteer a complaint instead of waiting to be asked vary, but presumably they do so because they think there is a benefit in doing so, like the possibility of physical changes, or even just the psychological value of airing a grievance. In other words, something about the environment or building personnel is causing them discomfort, either physical and/or psychological discomfort and preventing them from maximizing their enjoyment of the rented accommodation (Vischer, 2007).

In contrast, a requested complaint is more directly shaped by what the requestor asks. While very useful, this kind of complaint may be about building features or conditions that occupants care little or know nothing about, while missing issues which occupants find noteworthy, annoying, or easy to fix (Moezzi & Goins, 2011). Requested complaints and volunteered complaints may be different in many ways – that is, what the occupant expects to get out of the complaint, or what motivates a perception of dissatisfaction with the services provided in the rented premises. One school of thought about complaint handling especially by Taylor, Baldry, Bain, and Ellis (2003) treats users as customers. In this sense, if occupants are users, the job of the operator becomes occupant satisfaction. This is a natural perspective for buildings that outsource all or part of their operations functions. Where such a relationship exists, a customer service-oriented operations style might be motivated by benefits that this literature promotes. This line of thought sees complaints as potentially valuable input that can lead to improved products, services, and customer relationships (Brockhoff, 2003; Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985).

The intensity and fierceness of competition in contemporary markets have heightened tenants' awareness with respect to acceptable or tolerable levels of service delivery (Ramaseshan, Yip, & Pae, 2006). Property managers and proprietors have therefore been mindful of the quality of service they deliver to tenants. However, human and non-human instances of service delivery that fall short of tenants' expectation still occur. This is not necessarily a result of nonchalance on the part of service providers; but a consequence of the unique nature of services and the individuality of tenants (Morris, 2018). Thus, service providers are encouraged to continually gauge the quality of service they deliver, and also seek feedback from their tenants. Further provide access to tenants to lodge complaints when they are dissatisfied with the quality of service delivered to them (Ateke, Asiegbu, & Nwulu, 2015). The most prevalent occasions, especially for rented properties in the cities of the global south entail residential tenants who complain if and when they experience service failure in order to get restitution,

escape anger and recover self-esteem, help improve service quality or just altruistic motives (Arditi & Nawakorawit, 1999; Shapely, 2006).

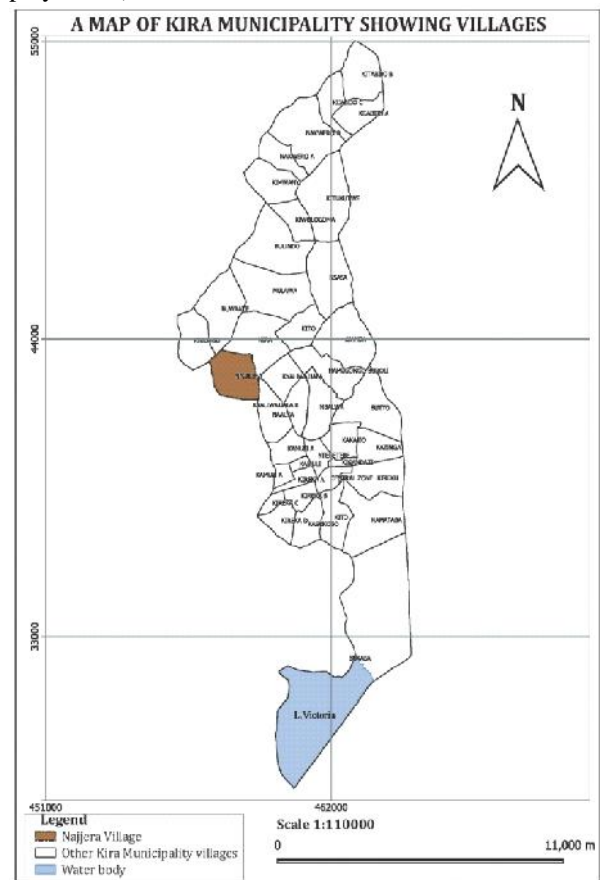


Figure 1. Locational map of the study area

**Complaining Accessibility amidst Landlord-tenant interactions:** There is an overarching challenge regarding the ease at which tenants are able to lodge complaints when they come and the procedure to be pursued in the resolution of such (Giddings & Gregory, 1996). Accessible complaint procedures are not available only when customers wish to complain; they should be open and accessible at all times. It is important that landlords consider the most effective way to ensure maximum accessibility. This may include placing information in waiting areas where customers can see them. Complaints leaflets can also be helpful and organizations may consider where these can most effectively be displayed (Ateke et al., 2015). Complaints submission accessibility also implies that tenants will not spend unnecessary costs in lodging a formal complaint using complex and formalized channels; and rather the complaint procedure will not be time consuming. It suggests therefore that the methods landlords use to handle complaints arising from unserviceability of premises are open to tenants and are adaptable to tenants' recovery needs (Nikbin, Ismail, Marimuthu, & Jalalkamali, 2010). One of the key avenues of ensuring tenant-landlord interaction and long lasting relationship according to Rasila (2010), is the sustenance of effective communication between the two parties, which is intended to allow either of the parties have a feel of the pulse of the other (Adanlawo, Rugbeer, Naidoo, & Reddy, 2018). It fosters friendliness between the tenant and the landlord. Tenant-Landlord interactions are essential for landlords because they enable them to serve the tenants better; and also give the tenants an idea of how well the landlord

values their relationship. Relationships are the soul of businesses; and no relationship thrives without interactions. Interactions opens up areas for further business, thus, Tenant-Landlord interaction contributes to the long-term success and survival of apartment occupancy levels (Gwinner, 2000). Complaints are a natural consequence of any service activity because "Mistakes are an unavoidable feature of all human endeavor and thus also of service delivery" (Boshoff, 1997). Service recovery is the process of putting the situation right though it has been defined more widely and more proactively as the action of seeking out and dealing with failures in the delivery of service. The term "complaint management" is used to include service recovery and involves the receipt, investigation, settlement and prevention of tenant complaints and tenant recovery (Singh, 1999). Dissatisfied tenants who complained had a higher level of lease renewal intention than those who did not complain (Wilkes, 2006). In contrast, the available tenant landlord relations cannot effectively solve tenant issues as it is believed that the landlord knows when to fix repairs on his/her property. The relationship is usually one way- it's only effective for rent collection and does not resolve most of tenant issues. The eventual result are the recurring tenant complaints. The reviewed literature herein identifies existence of tenants' complaints with parallel complaints resolution mechanisms. It is rather important to investigate the different degrees of satisfaction by the tenants on the accommodation related complaints raised, obtained through the qualitatively obtained experiences by both tenants and landlords of apartment properties.

## METHODOLOGY

**Research design and settings:** This study primarily adopted a case study strategy to have an in-depth understanding (Yin, 1994) of the satisfaction experiences of tenants concerning existing conflicts handling mechanisms in owner managed apartments. In addition, however, a narrative research design was adopted to buttress the case study design in a way of generating stories from respondents and eventually obtaining a grounded perspective of tenants' experiences (Riessman, 2011). The study further adopted a triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain primary data that was instrumental in achieving the key objective of the study issue. In this case, the quantitative approach allowed the researchers to solicit information expressed in numerical format while the qualitative approach complemented the quantitative approach by soliciting more detailed information expressed in textual format. In the selection of case study area and participants, we considered several criteria; Existence of formal tenancy agreement, Availability of complaint handling channels, An effective property management system.

**Study area:** The study was conducted from Najjera A, Bulabira zone a residential neighbourhood in Kira Municipality, Wasiko district, Uganda. It is one of the fast-developing residential suburbs, with increased demand for rental properties. The neighbourhood is characterised with a population of middle class dwellers who lodge there while commuting for work in the Kampala city centre. Kira Municipality has the highest percentage of apartments (51.7%) that is 1,152 units out of the total stock of houses available therein. According to Knightfrank (2021), apartments have increased from 2,006 units in the first six months of 2019 to 2,230 units in the first six months of 2020. The case study area

alone, according to local leaders has over 600 apartments with capacity to provide shelter to over 20,000 tenants (the Physical Planning Department, Kira Municipal Council).

**Sampling procedure:** Simple random sampling technique was used to select the tenants of the selected landlord managed apartments in Najjera-A, Bulabira zone. We randomly selected any tenant on the apartments. This gave chance to different tenants to give their views and be represented in the study. Each respondent had an equal probability of being selected from the population, ensuring that the sample was to be representative of the population (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, Purposive sampling technique was also used to select landlords and their representatives. This technique according to Patton (2002) helped the researcher look for the respondents who are more informed to give the reliable and unbiased data. Purposive sampling further enabled the researcher to focus on particular characteristics of the population that are of interest.

## Research instruments

This study made use of a variety of tools to obtain the required data, including; questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and documentary reviews: Self administered questionnaires contained both multiple choice questions and statements that are measured on a linear scale for easy analysis. These targeted some of the tenants and landlords' representatives. The questionnaires were used for the following reasons: a) their potential in reaching out to a large number of respondents within a short time, b) ability to give respondents adequate time to respond to the items, c) they offer a sense of security (confidentiality) to the respondent and d) their objective style since no bias results from the personal characteristics as in interviews (Owens, 2002). For this study, 25 tenants and 25 landlords were issued and responded to the questionnaire avenue. Face to face but structured interviews were further used to obtain information from participants. This was important to obtain in-depth explanations of tenants' experiences through detailed narrations. Key questions that were addressed in these interviews included; how participants channel their discontent regarding performance and serviceability of the property, the effectiveness of communication during dispute handling and their overall perceptions regarding the way their disputes regarding performance of the property are handled. A total of 20 tenants and 15 property owners were engaged as participants through this method, and sessions ranged between 40 minutes to an hour. Additionally, two focus group discussions were organised for tenants and landlords respectively. For each focus group discussion, six participants were purposively selected on the basis of having participated in either reporting a tenancy dispute (tenants) or handling the disputes (landlords). Sessions for focus group discussions took about two hours, and the views shared helped in checking the gaps observed through individualised interviews and questionnaires. Finally, Documentary review: was adopted for this study through studying the various literature relating to apartments tenancies and effectiveness of tenant dispute resolution. Such material was acquired from several scholarly sources including; journals, published text books, periodical reports, magazines and policy documents.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section details the narrations and experiences of users of owner managed apartments regarding how effectively their complaints are handled and how in a way this impacts on their stay in such premises. Satisfaction was perceived in different dimensions as elaborated below:

### Types of complaints lodged by tenants

**Complaints related to apartment physical features:** Each of the apartments' physical features were important to different users in establishing not only generation of complaints but also satisfaction levels with the serviceability of the rented apartment premises. One tenant noted:

I am comfortable with the size of rooms and general space much as my household has increased since we entered here as new tenants

Considering the general design and comfort of the premises, another tenant disclosed;

I complained to the landlord after staying here for about 3 years concerning the outdated design of my rented space. I needed adjustment to the house designs and painting to make my premises more attractive. My complaint was granted in a short while.

However, a bunch of grudges from occupants were generated regarding management and maintenance of facilities and general building services as one participant emphasised below:

On several occasions I have suffered blockages of our plumbing works which system I share with my next door neighbour. The burden of repair is shouldered on us and even then, the outsourced technicians do not respond to repair requests on time. On average they spend three days to turn up.

The above experience indicates that with the zonal planning of Najjera A, Bulabira zone as an urban plan where buildings must have airborne toilets/showers/washrooms. As well mostly people had indoor kitchens and even the outdoor kitchens were connected to water distribution channels. This greatly necessitates better response time in repairing plumbing services on the property. Though, on average, fewer participants had openly submitted complaints regarding plumbing works and house features, the discomfort could be felt especially the need for seemingly minor corrective maintenance of water pressure in taps, sanitary fittings that are technologically and functionary obsolete and leakages. On the whole the above observation is compliant with Mridha (2015) whose study in Dhaka confirmed how complex the issue of satisfaction is in whatever dimension while ascertaining that architectural features were some of the fundamental attributes that complaints and eventual satisfaction arise from. For instance, noise levels of lifts in apartments (Kalkman & Buijs, 2001), leakages and blockages of plumbing works (Hutchins, 2002). severally thus, residential satisfaction has been employed as a measure of housing quality by use of housing unit features, services and facilities provided in housing area and the housing environment to determine the degree to which a person is satisfied with the existing housing unit. Building quality in relation to quality of space, ventilation

and lighting in common areas, neighbourhood factors in relation to children playing spaces, cleanliness of corridors, stair cases, common areas and waste management (Amérigo & Aragones, 1997).

**Complaints with neighbourhood features:** Concerning the neighbourhood features, participants were generally comfortable with the trends and affairs of the neighbourhood. Some of the parameters pivoted about location and accessibility of the premises as regards to either social services or to the Kampala city centre. being a neighbourhood of fenced properties, neighbourhood challenges and complaints are generally likely to arise with immediate neighbours. One participant stated as follows:

Currently I am pleased with my immediate neighbours. However, in the past I had a neighbour who is a native of South Sudan who was unhygienic, used to leave garbage unattended to for days and such conditions spread to our premises.

Most of the participants occupying blocks where cleanliness of external and communal areas of the apartments had become a contentious issue complained to the concerned landlords who hired cleaning firms to take charge of the common areas. On the whole, waste management was by private companies because there are no garbage collection points on site. Concerning naughty neighbours, in instances where the landlords once reported to, would not solve the matter at hand, the affected households would be forced to shift to other premises where they perceive better value for money. Apart from the general state of security which apartment occupants contend with, participants observed that assuredness of security was mainly at night and specifically focused on external intrusion. There were complaints however, concerning internal security lapses. Some risks even arise from the non-compliant designs of the apartment blocks, especially storied ones as narrated by one of the participants below:

The balconies of these blocks were designed with wide spaces, probably targeting adults. Recently a two-year old baby moved through the balustrades on the fifth floor and fell to her death. Had the landlord listened to our complaints of readjusting balustrades and burglar proofing the story would have been different.

Concerning site works like parking space and children play area were evidently available on most apartment blocks. Mostly there was a paved yard and lawn compounds for visited apartments. Space for clothes drying lines was also provided for in the backyard of the apartment units with each unit having its own set. This indicates that the primary design of the apartments was more focused on adult tenants with no expectations that households with children would occupy the premises especially the top most floors. Past literature on neighbourhood relations has attested that annoying or disputing neighbours is a relatively common phenomenon (Cheshire & Buglar, 2016; Cheshire & Fitzgerald, 2015) even among apartment occupants. However, Cheshire and Buglar (2016) associate the trend predominantly among poor households which rarely occupy apartment housing but characterised with common anti-social behaviour.

**Satisfaction with property management style:** Under management factors, all tenants were generally happy with the

landlords' response to repair and maintenance concerns whenever they arise. Most maintenance operations especially minor maintenance are pursued in a scheduled and planned manner as we observed with management of most blocks having maintenance schedules that indicated which repair is to be done and when. With terms of tenancy in place, both landlord and tenant responsibilities are well stipulated. This reduces delays in repairs and maintenance programs as each of the parties has no excuse from fulfilling their obligations. The style and responsiveness of property management have a great bearing on the relationship between tenants and landlord and thus satisfaction of the tenants though in most cases response to maintenance requests is never satisfactory (Vera-Toscano & Ateca-Amestoy, 2008). In this way, one of the landlords commented that:

from my experience I have established that, the amount of satisfaction perceived by tenants in accordance to building features, apartment neighbourhood factors and management factors is completely dependent on what the landlord is willing to offer. When you look at how these apartments are developed and their management strategies, they are designed to impress tenants always because say the space, facilities in the apartment unit are equally important as the security, cleanliness of the common areas, garbage collection or response to repair and maintenance among the rest. That's why with all these new modern apartments you will find the majority of the tenants are happy residing there because landlords have now understood the nature of tenants they build for."

The intensity and fierceness of competition in contemporary markets have heightened tenants' awareness with respect to acceptable or tolerable levels of service delivery even at times at the expense of expected profits from the property investment. Tenants are aware of their rights and they demand for adequate services and facilities to be provided on the premises (Chegwe, 2014). This has created a competitive environment amongst landlords in terms of attracting and retaining tenants in their apartments with an assurance of meeting the tenants' expectations and beyond (Gubbay, 1999).

### **Complaint handling mechanisms practiced by apartment landlords**

**Mode of lodging complaints:** There was general consensus among study participants regarding availability of systems through which property related complaints are lodged. Available options are through phone calls, landlord's representative and face to face interaction with the landlords. However, the modes opted for are wholly dependent on accessibility of the landlords or their representatives at a time when they are needed. From the responses received, we established that phone calls were what was mostly used to complain by tenants to their landlord or their representatives by at times when phone call conversations wouldn't suffice, landlords also visit the residents occasionally for fact finding and this gives them an opportunity to see the complaints on site. One of the landlords had the following to say;

You need to consider what is comfortable for all tenants and what is comfortable for one tenant may not be the same for the other tenant. That is why they can lodge complaints through a phone call, face to face interactions

and landlord's representative. This gives a tenant options on what is easier for them.

Alternatively, doubts about the legitimacy of tenants' complaints influenced double checks to be carried out by landlords as one revealed below:

Sometimes tenants have outrageous expectations from the property management. They end up making complaints and requests that do not make sense. So physical verifications and reference to tenancy agreements help us to reach an acceptable common position on the matter.

The above narrations testify to the availability of internal albeit informal complaint handling procedures and modes of channelling complaints among the occupants and landlords of landlord managed apartments. This in a way helps the landlord resolve matters as soon as possible after the complaint has been raised. This creates a good relationship that leads to better service delivery and, eventually Tenant-Landlord interaction contributes to the long-term success and survival of apartment occupancy levels (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000). However, observation from the landlord's narration above signals the opportunistic tendencies which exist among some apartment tenants in demanding what is beyond the worth of the amount they paid for, leading to a variance in expectation of both parties (Lai & Lai, 2013).

**Duration of response to complaints raised:** As one of the most important aspects of complaint handling, the time taken for complaints to be responded to is worth discussing as a property management issue. We noted differing periods which were given in which participants obtained responses regarding tenants' claims and complaints that concern the services rendered in the property. A bunch of the participants indicated that the time taken to respond to maintenance requests depends on the type of maintenance required, although it keeps differing from time to time. On the whole, periods ranged in bands of day, week, month and in exceptional cases, beyond a month. One of the tenants participants said;

For the four years I have stayed in this apartment, obviously I have had several and differing complaints to the landlord and each was handled differently because some of the repairs are urgent and others you develop overtime and you can easily inform the landlord in time but at the same time some repairs require quick or immediate response while others cannot be fixed in a short time as you may want

Much as duration of response to tenants' complaints are crucial, similar to (Batikawai & Nawaqalevu, 2020) who analysed the phenomenon from Fiji islands, the duration of response is as well dependant on the terms of tenancy which specifies durations for minor and major repairs. The difference here is caused by the fact that urgency of the complaint and its overall impact on the present and future use and functionality of the property is a consideration in attending to some of the maintenance requests. This is generally because, most of the complaints raised are repair and maintenance issues which can sometimes be a little harder than just fixing them. It takes some time to find a reliable source for some repairs as for each repair and maintenance is a different case of its own. One of the landlords said;

*Given the nature of repair and maintenance, there should not even be defined periods to repairs. Buildings are also like human beings. You can not know when defects are bound to occur. This puts a landlord at task to have regular maintenance schedules in place.*

The above revelation in a way exhibits the extent of reluctance by landlords towards planning for maintenance works of apartment properties, evidently remaining reactive and eventually attracting discontent from tenants which would have initially been avoidable. Much as it is complex to predict long in advance how minor repair defects and eventual works will play about as influencing factors keep changing, ranging from such as availability of funds, the steadfast of the service providers/subcontractors and the duration of communication to reach the landlord. With all these factors at play, one can not easily say that a repair meant to take one day will still take one day. However, this is not an excuse for failure to plan deliver effectively and efficiently but rather meant to say that repairs are handled as fast as possible within the possible terms. The time taken to respond to tenants repair requests is equally important as the repair itself. Landlords and their representatives need to respond in a duration that is reasonable to the tenant for their efforts to be effective.

**Feedback mechanisms:** After responding to tenants' maintenance and repair concerns, landlords and their representatives are naturally expected to render feedback to ensure effective that effective response to the complaints raised is given, moreover in a timely manner. The agreed upon methods to gather feedback are commonly consistent with the means through which the complaints were generated. Commonly as indicated earlier in this section, most tenancy agreements stipulated means of communication through which even types of tenant dissatisfaction could be channeled. Similar to past literature, such avenues include physical meetings, telephone calls, written complaints memos and notices and periodical tenancy evaluations (Lauster & Easterbrook, 2011; Morden, 2010; Oyedele, 2013). From responses received, the mode of via phone calls was most predominant, followed by physical visits by landlords' representatives and others through writing. One of the landlords underpinned the importance of participation and responsiveness to tenant queries below:

These tenants like to be engaged in the entire process of resolving a complaint, beyond fixing the requested repair and maintenance. Mostly tenants want to be heard and know what/how the landlord thinks or what is the landlords perception on their matters.

However, even with the complaints raised by tenants from time to time, there were a number of grievances that were never responded to, even when landlords had been served in time. This negatively affected the tenants' satisfaction levels. Importantly, feedback is one way to know how effective the solutions provided are. This majorly done via phone calls to tenants, indicating that this is the most comfortable and cost efficient way for the landlord. Asking for feedback is the last element in complaint management. Complaint management involves the receipt, investigation, settlement and prevention of tenant complaints and tenant recovery (Jagdish Singh, 1988). Dissatisfied tenants who complained had a higher level of lease renewal intention than those who did not complain (

Singh & Wilkes, 2006), implying that the tendency to shift to other houses, under different management where they perceive that their concerns will be attended to.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This paper deeply investigates a previously neglected segment of tenancy satisfaction discourse by exploring in-depth experiences regarding satisfaction of tenants with existing complaints handling mechanisms, especially with landlord managed apartment blocks. From the finding, it is evident that landlord managed apartments largely provide residential satisfaction to their tenants, especially in the way raised complaints are handled. Experiences regarding satisfaction levels were categorised in four thematic areas including; types of complaints handling mechanisms practiced by landlords, modes of lodging complaints, duration of response to complaints and feedback mechanisms. Services, security were well present in the apartments, repairs and maintenance programs have been dealt with in accordance to landlords' capacities. This means repairs are done depending on their magnitude, minor repairs are done in a shortest time that is a day or a week's time and major repairs are done in a month's time if bigger than they are scheduled for to the availability of financial resources. Most tenancy agreements allocated minor repairs to be tenants' responsibility. Nevertheless, shared experiences exhibit tenants' unprecedented craft where they raise unjustified complaints to landlords in a bid to obtain what is beyond the value for their money.

No wonder, some complaints go unattended to as landlords and their representatives don't weigh much merit in them. This paper recommends efficient property management practices where landlords have to appreciate that maintaining the apartment is the key resource to meet tenants' expectations and it is recommended therefore that they adopt appropriate measures in order to improve and maintain their property in a habitable state. This is through improving maintenance by engaging in planned maintenance programme; periodic and orderly preventive maintenance schedules. From the terms of tenancy, repair and maintenance schedules should be prepared stating the landlord and tenant responsibilities and should as well state the modes of communication between them. Landlords' responsibilities should ideally cover all major repairs whereas tenants' responsibilities should prioritise all minor repairs and a time frame should be set when each should be done. Failure to honour the requirements then, the aggrieved party should have a right to make the requisite claims for amends. This paper has explored tenant experiences with regard to landlord managed apartment properties commonly those with existing tenancy agreements that detail each party's responsibilities. However, we recommend that future research should venture into status quo for outsourced and professionally managed properties. In this regard, a comparison of tenant satisfaction levels with complaints handling mechanisms in both landlord and outsourced management systems will enable better grounding in appreciation of the issue.

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