

INFLUENCE OF PERSONAL SPACE ON PRIVACY-RELATED PSYCHOLOGICAL COMFORT IN MIGRATORY SETTLEMENTS: A CASE STUDY OF MUTHTHETTUGALA, KURUNEGALA

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ABSTRACT

The housing programs designed for migrant communities in Sri Lanka are mostly focused on the physical aspect of housing, ignoring other aspects of living environments, such as privacy and personal space. The proxemics theory of personal space, developed by Hall in 1966, has been found to affect human behaviours. Other studies have found that inadequate privacy-related psychological comfort and personal space can cause negative effects on human psychology. Migratory communities are likely to face these issues, especially since their new living environment would disrupt their previous spatial and social environments. The present study aims to investigate the effect of personal space on the privacy-related psychological well-being of the people living in the selected migrant housing settlement in Kurunegala. A mixed-method approach has been employed to conduct this study, and all 24 households in the selected settlement were surveyed using structured questionnaires consisting of both quantitative and qualitative questions. The results of the study found that the high residential proximity and lack of control over personal space negatively affect the privacy-related psychological comfort of residents of the housing settlement. Though the people adapt to these situations, the lack of privacy causes negative aspects such as increased stress, decreased psychological security, low feelings of belonging, and decreased autonomy, especially for people living in the rural areas of Sri Lanka. The study concludes that the control over personal space has greater significance for the privacy-related psychological well-being of people than the size of the dwelling or the density of the residential area.

Keywords: Migratory settlements; Personal space; Privacy; Psychological well-being.

1. INTRODUCTION

Internal migration in Sri Lanka has been influenced by different factors such as urban sprawl, infrastructure development, changes in livelihoods, and environmental pressures. As a solution for that, the government has introduced planned housing schemes to accommodate migrants and displaced people. While these projects meet immediate accommodation needs, they often have high-density residential environments with

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standardized layouts. Such configurations often prioritize efficiency at the expense of residents' need for privacy, especially the kind experienced through personal space.

The home is where a person lives and feels at ease, supporting their everyday needs and emotional wellness. For folks who move to new areas, it's usually a shift from places they know well to tighter, less flexible living spaces. These changes can seriously impact their ability to control privacy and personal space, which are super important for feeling mentally healthy (Altman, 1975). Researchers keep finding that how you live really affects your mental health as a migrant (Ziersch et al., 2024; WHO, 2025). Yet, there's not much known about how changing residences influences privacy and psychological wellness in migrants, especially in Sri Lanka, where plenty of housing is provided for them.

The purpose of this investigation is to assess the effect of privacy in relation to the personal space of migrants in terms of their psychological well-being. Privacy is an essential element for every individual since it affects the comfort level, security, self-control, and psychological well-being of people. The problem, however, lies in the fact that migration usually involves dramatic shifts in the physical environment and the relationships that a person maintains with others, and as a result, it may negatively affect his or her privacy. Thus, the present research should focus on the importance of privacy and its impact on the psychological well-being of migrants. It is necessary to identify the major aspects of privacy and its relationship with psychological well-being, namely the social and spatial factors that promote psychological well-being and comfort, as well as the role of migration-related environmental changes on this process.

This study focuses on privacy experienced within personal spaces in the selected housing settlement. The scope is limited to spatial and psychological dimensions of housing. Limitations include a restricted sample size, potential recall bias regarding previous privacy conditions, and the subjective nature of privacy-related psychological well-being assessments.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 PERSONAL SPACE AND PRIVACY

Personal space and privacy are central concepts in environmental psychology that affect human behaviour in homes. Proxemics theory, developed by Hall in 1966, defined personal space as a cultural boundary that affects how close we get to other people. It is not only about distance but also encompasses cultural values, identity, and control. In homes, personal spaces exist on different levels, from inside the homes to the neighbourhood or village where one resides.

Another important aspect of environmental psychology in homes is territoriality. Brown and Altman (1983) argued that markers of territory and personalization of spaces increase one's level of control and safety. When one lacks an opportunity to establish or defend one's territory or personal spaces, it affects one's mental well-being negatively.

Altman's theory of privacy regulation (1975) defined privacy as a constantly evolving process of managing one's personal spaces or boundaries. One makes adjustments to the level of involvement in social interactions to achieve an optimal level of detachment and association. When it becomes difficult to manage one's personal spaces in an environment, it can result in stress. Thus, it is not only about detachment but also about

control over one's association or involvement with others. In a highly populated or standardized living environment, such as apartments or condos, one has limited means of protecting one's privacy through barriers or transitional spaces.

2.2 THEORETICAL LINKAGES BETWEEN PERSONAL SPACE, PRIVACY, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

In this research, psychological well-being is seen as the main dependent variable and represents the general psychological condition of the person. These aspects include feeling comfortable, safe, emotionally balanced and contented with one's living circumstances. While there are some terms mentioned in the literature such as psychological comfort, psychological stability and psychological stress, they have not been taken as distinct independent variables in this research because of their interrelatedness as factors influencing psychological well-being.

In the context of residential environments, proper maintenance of adequate personal space and effective regulation of one's privacy may have some impact on these factors through the process of minimizing any form of social intrusions into one's life, managing one's emotions, and having good control over one's daily activities. Prior studies have already revealed the impact of these two factors on psychological well-being, especially in the context of high-density living and migration (Altman, 1975; Evans et al., 2003; Gifford, 2007). Thus, in this research, the relationship between personal space and privacy as spatial experiences and the psychological well-being of migrants will be investigated. Housing, Density, and Psychological Well-being

One interesting way to divide the relationship between our surroundings and our psychological well-being is the difference between density, or the actual number of people in a space, and crowding, or the feeling that there isn't enough space. Density does not necessarily contribute to stress, but crowding does, especially when a sense of privacy is lacking, and this can contribute to psychological strain in people. Evans (2003) indicates that living in a crowded space for long periods of time can increase stress, hurt cognitive functioning, and reduce emotional well-being. A big part of this is the sense of control when people cannot control their surroundings or their interactions with people in their space, environmental stress increases.

According to Gifford (2007), a lack of privacy can contribute to irritability, withdrawal from social situations, and even more conflicts within the home space. Our satisfaction with our living space is not just based on the physical space, but also on its functionality for our lives and our personal meaning or significance for our well-being (Amerigo & Aragones, 1997). Being able to maintain our own space within our living space is a large contributor to our personal well-being.

2.3 MIGRATION AND MIGRATORY COMMUNITIES

Migration is defined as 'the displacement of people or households across a geographic boundary, be it temporary or permanent, for various reasons, including job opportunities, education, family needs, environmental influences or to seek a better life. These displaced people are often required to adapt to new social and physical environment, a different culture etc. During the migration process groups of people often create new communities in their destination area based on their social relationships and neighborhood grouping' (Castles et al., 2020: 10). A migratory community is comprised of those migrants whose

social and domestic lives are affected by the new conditions of housing, relationships and space, while remaining in contact with home to various degrees. Migration is therefore a process of social and physical transformation of communities as well as a geographic displacement (Castles et al., 2020; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024; United Nations, 2023).

2.4 MIGRATION, RESETTLEMENT, AND SPATIAL DISRUPTION

Migration, especially when state-driven, can transform lifestyles and environments. Place attachment theory provides a mental health perspective on this phenomenon, and the theory further explains the psychological impact of migration. Lewicka (2011) describes place attachment as an emotional bond formed through long-term interaction with familiar environments. People are more likely to cope if there is some spatial continuity in terms of shared architectural elements or settlement form.

Cerneia (1997) highlights how migration causes dislocation in terms of social networks, ways of living, and a sense of place, which in turn causes psychological distress. Scudder (2005) highlights how resettlement is a success if it involves rebuilding social and cultural life in a new place, as opposed to simply moving from one place to another. Housing programs are often geared towards achieving uniformity in space, increasing housing densities, and reducing costs. This has been at the expense of flexibility in space. Housing programs that are geared towards efficiency often try to standardize the way homes are laid out, glossing over the way people have been living in the past. This has resulted in a disconnect between the old settlement form and the new housing environment.

However, there are gaps in literature, and one is that there is a lack of studies that examine and compare pre- and post-settlement morphology, or how spaces are arranged before and after migration. Another is that there is a lack of studies that examine how they change, and how they impact psychological outcomes. Lastly, there is a lack of studies on Sri Lankan migratory housing schemes and how they impact mental health. Thus, a case study analysis of the Arayliya Uyana Housing Scheme, which examines both spatial and psychological outcomes, can be a way to address the gap in knowledge. This is because it can examine how spaces are arranged before and after migration, thus providing a comparison and a better understanding of how changes in morphology can impact personal space regulation and psychological outcomes.

2.5 CRITICAL SYNTHESIS AND RESEARCH GAP

Personal space, privacy, and mental health are linked. Environmental psychology explains this relationship. These theories explain how a lack of control over spatial arrangements can lead to stress and negative psychological outcomes. Studies on migration highlight social and cultural upsets, and housing studies highlight the limitations of a one-size-fits-all approach to planning.

These are some of the important limitations of the current literature base. Firstly, very little work has been done to compare morphological characteristics prior to migration to those after resettlement; this means comparing the spatial organization of living quarters before and after migration. Secondly, there is an absence of studies on the temporal dimension of such changes in space and the psychological ramifications thereof. Finally, and most importantly for this paper, there has been very little work done on migratory

housing schemes in Sri Lanka and the psychological impact thereof. One such example, which could potentially be used to fill this lacuna, would be the selected Housing Scheme.

2.6 PARAMETERS OF THE STUDY

In order to analyse the interconnections between personal space and privacy in relation to psychological well-being, the following parameters have been identified for consideration. The parameters of privacy include spatial distance, connectivity, visual access, spatial depth, and boundary definition, while the parameters of psychological well-being include perceived privacy, environmental control, stress and comfort, social balance, and place attachment, which show the role of spatial design in the two concepts. The study variables and their operational definitions were developed from the environmental psychology literature and translated into measurable questionnaire indicators that could capture residents' perceptions of privacy, spatial control, and psychological comfort.

2.6.1 Selected Parameters to Study Personal Space

Selected parameters to study personal space are explained in Table 1.

Table 1 : Privacy parameters of the study

Parameter	Explanation
Perceived Control Over Access	The degree to which individuals can regulate entry into their immediate spatial environment; reduced control increases perceived crowding and stress (Altman, 1975; Evans & Lepore, 1993).
Visual Privacy Level	The extent to which individuals are protected from unwanted visual exposure within their personal space; reduced visual privacy can increase psychological strain (Altman, 1975; De Macedo et al., 2022).
Acoustic Privacy Level	The degree of protection from unwanted sound intrusion; prolonged noise exposure can elevate stress and disrupt psychological restoration (Evans & Johnson, 2000; Basner & McGuire, 2018).
Interpersonal Distance	The physical distance maintained between individuals; distances below preferred personal norms may increase discomfort and physiological stress responses (Hall, 1966; Evans & Wener, 2007).

2.6.2 Selected Parameters to Study Privacy-Related Psychological Comfort

Selected parameters to study privacy-related psychological comfort are defined in Table 2.

Table 2 : Study privacy-related psychological comfort Parameters

Parameter	Explanation
Cultural Proxemic Alignment	The degree of consistency between culturally preferred interpersonal distances and actual spatial conditions; a mismatch may increase social discomfort and psychological stress (Hall, 1966; Sorokowska et al., 2017).
Territorial Definition / Personalization	The presence of clearly defined or personalized micro-territories within the living environment; territorial markers can strengthen feelings of ownership, control, and psychological security (Altman, 1975; Brown et al., 2005).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 SITE, SAMPLE SELECTION CRITERIA, AND DATA COLLECTION METHOD

For this study, a survey was applied, as all 24 families in the village were targeted, thereby reducing sampling errors in the targeted population. The use of a survey design is applicable in small populations where the objective is not to generalize to a larger population but to gain an in-depth understanding of the population (Yin, 2018, World Health Organization 2025). The mixed format of questions in the questionnaire was applied to ensure that there was a balance between quantitative and qualitative information. The use of mixed methods in a study was recommended as a means to ensure that there was an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In small populations, sufficient information can be obtained even from a small sample (Kirsti Malterud et al., 2016).

The study area is located in the Kurunegala District. The area was initially used for the cultivation of coconuts, while later the area was divided into smaller sections by a private enterprise, resulting in the area being used as a residential area. This area was chosen because of the urban expansion that is taking place. The changes that can be observed include improvements to the infrastructure, an increase in the number of houses, and the presence of the highway, all contributing to the increased value of the land.



Figure 1: Selected site for the study

3.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK OF VARIABLES

The chosen variables came from environmental psychology theories on privacy, personal space, and psychological well-being. Personal space was measured by the following four variables: control over access, visual privacy, acoustic privacy, and interpersonal distance. The psychological comfort associated with privacy was measured using cultural proxemic congruency and territoriality/personalization (Altman, 1975; Hall, 1966; Brown et al., 2005).

Quantitative data were recorded using a five-point Likert scale and analyzed using Jamovi statistical software. Measures of central tendency and dispersion were obtained to find patterns in participants who had a rural, semi-rural, and urban background. Thematic analysis of qualitative data involved coding together similar responses in relation to privacy, spatial adaptation, and psychological comfort (Creswell, 2014). Integration of results from the two forms of analysis allowed for an in-depth discussion of the personal space-privacy psychological well-being relationship.

3.3 SPECIFIC ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

No personal data capable of identifying the respondents was gathered, thus, ensuring anonymity among the participants. Considering the sensitive topic of the study concerning privacy and personal space in domestic settings, other steps were undertaken to safeguard the privacy of the individuals, community, and living environment. The study did not involve gathering any exact location addresses, personal photos, detailed house plans, or other similar forms of identifying information to avoid posing certain threats to social psychology. Thus, the characteristics of the settlement were illustrated using maps and analysis. Any form of data gathering and analysis was done only in relation to the purposes of the study. (Belmont Report, 1979; Israel & Hay, 2006; APA, 2017).

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND DATA SOURCES

This chapter examines privacy via quantitative and qualitative data from all 24 households in the selected migratory settlement. Quantitative data comes from an original survey comprising five-point Likert scales and open-ended questions. Psychological comfort and privacy are positively correlated, that is, high survey scores reflect a high level of comfort and privacy. Jamovi was used to calculate survey means, standard deviations, and test scores for skewness and kurtosis. Shapiro–Wilk was used to test survey normality. Migration patterns were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Privacy stress was surveyed using constructs from the environmental psychology theories of Altman (1975), Hall (1966), and Evans et al. (2003). Two survey groups were constructed, Personal Space Parameters and Privacy-Related Psychological Comfort Parameters. The former incorporates Interpersonal Distance, Perceived Control Over Access, Visual Privacy, and Acoustic Privacy. The latter includes Territorial Definition/Personalization and Cultural Proxemic Alignment. The absence of normal distribution in the rural-origin sub-groups (Shapiro–Wilk $p < 0.05$, high kurtosis) points to a lack of intragroup variability and the presence of intergroup variability, indicating privacy stress is systematic.

4.2 SAMPLE PROFILE: MIGRATION BACKGROUND

4.2.1 Origin Background

The majority of residents come from semi-rural areas (54%), followed by those from rural (25%) and urban (21%) areas. Because residents from rural areas used to live in low density areas that they could organize themselves, they are the most divergent from the compact, organized designs of current settlements. Thus, in this analysis, we expect rural-origin residents will display the most psycho-spatial dislocation in Table 3.

Table 3 : Distribution of residents by origin background (n = 24)

Origin Background	n	%	Spatial Characteristics of Origin
Rural	6	25%	Low density · self-regulated privacy · expansive outdoor space
Semi-rural	13	54%	Moderate density · mixed built-natural environment
Urban	5	21%	High density · structured housing · reduced open space
Total	24	100%	

4.3 REASONS FOR MIGRATION

Migration is primarily purposive and settlement-oriented: permanent residence and employment/education together account for 42% of cases. Notably, privacy was rarely cited as a consideration, suggesting that privacy related psychological well-being was not consciously anticipated before arrival, making subsequent spatial stress potentially more disorienting for residents.

Table 4 : Stated Reasons for Migration (n = 24)

Reason for Migration	n / %	Analytical Category
Permanent Residence	5 (21%)	Primary settlement-seeking migrants
Employment + Education	5 (21%)	Dual-purpose economic migrants
Convenience	4 (17%)	Proximity to services/family
Marriage / Education alone / Employment alone	6 (25%)	Social or single-purpose relocation
Facilities / Privacy / None	4 (17%)	Access-based or unspecified relocation

4.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PREVIOUS SETTLEMENT CONDITIONS

A retrospective analysis establishes the psychological baseline against which current conditions are compared, grounded in Cernea's (1997) concept of spatial dislocation and Lewicka's (2011) place attachment theory.

Table 5 : Psychological analysis of previous settlement conditions by origin background

Parameter	Rural Mean	Semi-rural Mean	Urban Mean	Explanatory Note
Interpersonal Distance	Crowding: 2.00 Solitude: 3.50	Crowding: 2.46 Solitude: 3.46	Crowding: 2.20 Solitude: 3.40	Rural: lowest perceived crowding; highest solitude capacity
Perceived Control Over Access	3.00	3.38	3.60	Urban control has the highest reverses post-migration

Parameter	Rural Mean	Semi-rural Mean	Urban Mean	Explanatory Note
Visual Privacy (via calmness)	4.17	3.23	2.40	Rural areas enjoyed substantially higher visual privacy
Acoustic Privacy (via stress)	Stress: 1.83	Stress: 2.77	Stress: 2.60	Rural areas had significantly lower acoustic stress
Territorial Definition / Personalization	Solitude: 3.50 Calmness: 4.17	Solitude: 3.46 Calmness: 3.23	Solitude: 3.40 Calmness: 2.40	Rural personalization is highest; urban people are accustomed to density
Cultural Proxemic Alignment	Calmness: 4.17 Stress: 1.83	Calmness: 3.23 Stress: 2.77	Calmness: 2.40 Stress: 2.60	Rural proxemic alignment strongest and largest post-migration gap

Three themes emerge from the analysis. The first theme relates to the finding that residents coming from rural areas had the highest emotional calmness score ($M = 4.17$), the lowest acoustic stress ($M = 1.83$), and the highest visual privacy score ($M = 4.17$) in the preceding environment, thereby demonstrating that the psycho-spatial disparity due to migration is higher for this category of respondents. Secondly, Shapiro-Wilk tests of non-normality in the rural population distributions, along with high kurtosis values, imply that the majority of the rural residents had almost similar experiences of high levels of privacy, which means that the change of environment to selected settlement involves a collective, not an individual disturbance. Thirdly, it was found that respondents coming from urban areas had low levels of privacy but low levels of stress as well because of the prior adaptation to urban life; thus, this group's psychological adaptation process is easier.

4.5 CURRENT SETTLEMENT CONDITIONS: CONSOLIDATED PARAMETER ANALYSIS

Table 6 presents a consolidated summary of all six study parameters across the three origin sub-groups. Mean scores for each indicator are reported alongside a key interpretive finding per parameter.

Table 6 : Consolidated analysis of personal space and privacy-related psychological well-being in the current settlement, by origin background

Parameter	Indicators	Rural Mean	Semi-rural Mean	Urban Mean	Key Finding
Interpersonal Distance	Physical Closeness	4.67	4.00	3.40	Spatial adaptation ≠ psychological adaptation; the rural gap is widest
	Distance Comfort	3.50	3.85	3.80	
	Routine Interruption	2.50	2.23	1.80	

Parameter	Indicators	Rural Mean	Semi-rural Mean	Urban Mean	Key Finding
Perceived Control	Safety via Control	4.50 ▲	3.92	2.80	Control is the primary predictor of psychological security
Over Access	Unannounced Entry	1.17 ▼	2.38 ▲	1.20	
Visual Privacy	Visual Exposure	3.17 ▲	2.46	1.80	1:1 correlation confirms visual surveillance triggers identity stress
	Self-Consciousness	3.17 ▲	2.54	1.80	
Acoustic Privacy	Routine Interruption	2.50	2.23	1.80	Latent stressor; embedded in daily fatigue rather than explicit complaint
	Space-Related Stress	2.33	2.46	1.40	
Territorial Definition / Personalization	Personal Area	4.17	3.92	3.40	Micro-territory functions as a primary coping resource for spatial stress
	Emotional Attachment	4.83 ▲	4.38	3.80	
	Psychological Stability	4.17	4.23	3.80	
Cultural Proxemic Alignment	Cultural Comfort	4.17	4.23 ▲	3.60	Rural proxemic gap largest; cultural norm violation = persistent background stressor
	Cultural Discomfort	2.83 ▲	2.62	1.60	

From the data provided, there is a clear trend towards experiencing privacy stress due to psychological factors among the first three variables under consideration and depending on the origin of the respondents. Rural residents demonstrate the highest level of physical proximity ($M = 4.67$) as regards interpersonal distance; however, they feel only a moderate level of psychological comfort ($M = 3.50$). It can be associated with the theory of exposure stress proposed by Evans and Lepore (1993). As can be observed from distributional characteristics of the obtained scores, there is some adaptation of people to the circumstances rather than the full adjustment. The feeling of control about access proves to be the most important indicator of psychological security. In turn, residents who come from the countryside report the highest levels of feeling safe ($M = 4.50$) and the lowest number of surprise visitors ($M = 1.17$). On the contrary, semi-rural dwellers have the highest level of boundary permeability ($M = 2.38$) and city residents demonstrate the lowest level of self-assurance with regard to the control of access ($M = 2.80$). It demonstrates the decrease in spatial independence characteristic of learned helplessness according to Evans (2003). Equally, visual privacy reveals a striking correlation between visual exposure and self-consciousness in both rural and urban dwellers (the means for both groups being 3.17 for rural dwellers and 1.80 for urban dwellers). In this regard, one

may conclude that the absence of typical visual barriers such as vegetation, verandas, and setbacks results in continuous identity-related stress as individuals experience permanent psychological surveillance.

Finally, three additional criteria provide insight into how stress associated with privacy transcends physical aspects of living spaces. Acoustic privacy acts as an indirect source of stress, whereby the scores for interruption remain relatively low (from 1.80 to 2.50), but space-related stress continues to exist, especially in the case of semi-rural subjects, who report higher stress scores (2.46) than the frequency of interruptions they endure (2.23). As indicated by Evans and Johnson (2000), chronic exposure to low noise levels can reduce cognitive recovery, even though it goes unnoticed. The highest mean score recorded in the present research concerns territorial definition and personalization of spaces for rural-origin subjects ($M = 4.83$).

It implies that people cope with a general sense of lacking privacy by fostering attachments to micro-territories, a coping mechanism described by Brown & Perkins (1992). While these attachments help ensure mental balance, they must be regarded as a way of coping with poor spatial arrangements rather than being proof of adequate living spaces. The last category of proxemics, i.e., cultural proxemics, demonstrates an interesting contradiction observed in the group of rural origin, which exhibits both the highest levels of cultural comfort ($M = 4.17$) and cultural discomfort ($M = 2.83$). The phenomenon can be explained in accordance with Hall's (1966) notion that deeply rooted spatial norms may play an important role in people's lives regardless of the need to violate them daily.

4.6 CROSS-PARAMETER SYNTHESIS

Table 7 integrates findings across all parameters and origin sub-groups to identify overarching patterns.

Table 7 : Cross-parameter synthesis of privacy and psychological well-being indicators by origin background

Parameter	Rural Origin	Semi-rural Origin	Urban Origin	Key Insight
Interpersonal Distance	High stress	Moderate	Low stress	Physical proximity $\neq$ psychological comfort; the rural gap is widest
Perceived Control Over Access	High security	Moderate	Low security	Control is the strongest predictor of psychological safety
Visual Privacy	High exposure/stress	Moderate	Low exposure	1:1 correlation: exposure drives self-consciousness
Acoustic Privacy	Elevated (latent)	Moderate-high	Low	Normalized background stressor; missed by standard assessments
Territorial Definition	Strong attachment	Strong	Moderate	Micro-territories are the primary coping resource

Parameter	Rural Origin	Semi-rural Origin	Urban Origin	Key Insight
Cultural Proxemic Alignment	Largest gap	Moderate gap	Smallest gap	Cultural displacement amplifies spatial stress for rural migrants

Those of rural origins suffer from the highest psycho-spatial burden. In all five of six criteria, residents with rural origins suffer from the highest levels of privacy stress or the largest discrepancies between past and current criteria, resulting from the large discrepancy between their past spatial environments and the standardized compactness of the selected site. Control, not space, is the key to psychological comfort. The perceived control over access is strong evidence that subjective freedom in the spatial environment is of greater psychological importance than objective factors like living space and residence density. Coping strategies mitigate the effects of poor privacy design. High territorial attachment and high rates of compensatory behavior point to an active coping strategy; yet the fact that stress criteria persist in multiple criteria suggests that the coping process does not negate but mitigates the structural problem. Psychological impacts are structurally differentiated, not randomly determined. The presence of non-normal distribution with higher-than-normal kurtosis among the two subgroups of residents with rural origins reveals the structural differentiation of privacy stress, which suggests that some resident groups face structural disadvantages with regard to spatial design.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that privacy significantly impacts mental well-being, acting more as a structural influence than a direct benefit. Deterioration of privacy in small resettlement dwellings causes uneven, multi-dimensional harm, particularly affecting those from rural backgrounds the most.

5.1 PSYCHO-SPATIAL GAP AND DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT

Rural-origin residents previously enjoyed the highest emotional calmness ($M = 4.17$), lowest acoustic stress ($M = 1.83$), and strongest visual privacy conditions sustained by low-density environments, natural buffers, and self-regulated access. The transition to the migratory settlement removes these spatial mediators entirely, producing interpersonal closeness scores of $M = 4.67$ with only moderate psychological comfort ($M = 3.50$): Evans and Lepore's (1992) involuntary exposure stress, wherein functional coping masks unresolved strain. Shapiro-Wilk nonnormality and elevated kurtosis confirm this stress is collectively generated (Cernea, 1997), not individually variable. Urban-origin residents, pre-adapted to density, display substantially lower stress throughout, confirming that distress is proportional to the degree of dislocation, not to density itself.

5.2 PERCEIVED CONTROL: THE PRINCIPAL MEDIATOR

Perceived control over access is the study's strongest single mediator of psychological security. Rural origin residents achieve the highest safety scores ($M = 4.50$) through active boundary enforcement (fewest unannounced entries, $M = 1.17$), while semi-rural residents face chronic privacy dysregulation (Altman, 1975) with the highest intrusion rate ($M = 2.38$), and urban-origin residents display the lowest control belief ($M = 2.80$)

consistent with Evans' (2003) learned helplessness model. Across all groups, the evidence is unambiguous: it is the *perception* of control, not objective floor area or density, that determines psychological security.

5.3 VISUAL AND ACOUSTIC PRIVACY AS COMPOUNDED STRESSORS

The perfect positive relationship between visual intrusion and self-consciousness (with mean scores of 3.17 for rural and 1.80 for urban) illustrates the point that visual intrusion necessitates constant self-monitoring (Goffman, 1959). This means that the house loses its function as a place of retreat for performance. The intermediate barriers that used to mediate this are architecturally missing. Acoustic distress becomes a hidden form of stress since while scores for interruptions are low (mean scores range from 1.80 to 2.50), among the semi-rural dwellers, scores for space-related stress (mean = 2.46) exceed those for interruptions (mean = 2.23) as found by Evans and Johnson (2000) for low-level chronic noise, which interferes with restoration even before conscious appraisal.

5.4 TERRITORIAL COPING AND CULTURAL PROXEMIC MISALIGNMENT

The highest mean score from the survey, emotional attachment to micro-territories among individuals with rural backgrounds ($M = 4.83$) indicates an intensity of coping strategies, rather than satisfaction: when macroscale privacy is insufficient, residents adapt through territorial personalization (Brown & Perkins, 1992), obtaining actual stability ($M = 4.17$) through psychological efforts which are not indicative of satisfaction. The cultural proxemics paradox, an individual's comfort ($M = 4.17$) in combination with the highest level of discomfort ($M = 2.83$) experienced by people with rural backgrounds, indicates an ongoing struggle with respect to normative spatial practices (Hall, 1966), which creates an unyielding source of discomfort that does not readily get habituated (Sorokowska et al., 2017).

5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR DESIGN AND POLICY

None of the proximity measurements, whether floor area, density, or metric proximity, can serve as an equivalent alternative to a comprehensive assessment of all six factors found in the current study. Proper design of a new settlement requires the integration of visual barriers (zones of transition, border planting), sound mitigation measures, spatial boundaries that re-establish the sense of control, and cultural understanding of personal space distances. These are the psychological prerequisites for restoring well-being in the case of rural origin migrants who, in our findings, were always the least privileged group.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this research clearly indicates that privacy in migratory settlements is a structural aspect that contributes to psychological well-being. This is supported by the results obtained in the selected settlement, which indicate that living in close proximity, less visibility/audibility buffering, and spatial control contribute to stress amongst inhabitants, especially among people originating from rural areas. The perception of individual control over personal space proved more significant than even physical aspects like floor area and housing density. Individuals manage spatial stress through territoriality at the micro-level, but this serves as a coping mechanism and does not solve the problem. Moreover, cultural proxemics makes the situation worse for individuals coming from

rural backgrounds. It is imperative that housing policies in Sri Lanka take privacy into consideration while designing houses for migratory populations.

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