

Original article

Unveiling and analyzing masculine perspectives in the domestic realms of the middle-income demographic in the context of Dhaka

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the dynamics of masculinity within middle-income households in Dhaka, Bangladesh, focusing on the connection between male perspectives and dwelling spaces. Rooted in the premise that housing is a cultural artifact reflecting social norms and gender roles, the study aims to understand how men in this demographic interact with, perceive, and utilize domestic spaces. Given Dhaka's rapid urbanization and the challenges faced by middle-income groups in securing suitable housing, the research investigates male attitudes, preferences, and challenges in managing households. Using a mixed-method approach, the study employs semi-structured interviews and observations, both qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted in two distinct areas to understand the male perception. Key findings reveal that traditional notions of masculinity, emphasizing financial provision and minimal domestic engagement, continue to influence housing preferences and interactions with dwelling spaces. Also evolving social expectations have introduced a nuanced shift, including increased demands for privacy, designated workspaces, and multifunctional living areas. The study concludes that architectural design must prioritize flexibility, privacy, and tailored functionality to meet the needs of male residents, enhancing their well-being, and involvement with dwelling and family members. These findings have broader implications for housing policies and design practices, emphasizing the need for inclusive, user-centered approaches that address evolving gender dynamics in urban contexts. By integrating the insights, architects can create more equitable and adaptive gender friendly residential environments.

Keywords: Activity, domestic realm design, domestic spaces, male perspective, privacy

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INTRODUCTION

The home and its settings, as cultural artifacts, reflect prevailing social norms and characteristics. Over time, domestic interiors have evolved to mirror the changing roles of both men and women in society. Rapoport emphasized in his work "House Form and Culture" that housing is a product of culture.^[1] Housing, comprising various options such as houses, apartments, and condos, serves as a fundamental refuge for individuals, families, or groups, meeting essential needs for shelter, safety, and comfort. In Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, which experienced consistent growth, the population reached nearly 23 million in 2020, with an annual increase of 735,230. Despite lacking a precise definition, the middle-income group constitutes 45% of the population,

spanning the 4th–8th deciles.^[2] In Dhaka, middle-income groups occupy a substantial 65% of residential land, with 20% owning homes and 80% opting for rentals.^[3] Exploring masculine perspectives within middle-income households is a critical area of inquiry, shedding light on the intricate dynamics of gender roles and identities within domestic contexts. As socioeconomic factors intersect with cultural norms, they shape power dynamics, decision-making processes, and daily interactions within households. And society, shaped by the values and norms of the community that builds it. Consequently, it is subject to social change, reflecting prevailing lifestyles and societal models, and adapting as these evolve. Housing spaces often embody gender stereotypes, reflecting differences in the roles of men and women within society, family, and the household. Understanding masculine perspectives within the

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middle-income demographic is paramount for deciphering gender dynamics and their implications for household relationships and individual well-being. Study shows that middle-income households often navigate tensions between traditional gender norms and evolving social expectations, highlighting the need for nuanced examination.^[4] Some emphasizes masculinity as a socially constructed phenomenon influenced by broader structural factors such as class, race, and ethnicity.^[5] In the specific context of Dhaka, Bangladesh, studies delve into how cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic realities shape masculine identities.^[6] Middle-income households in Dhaka present a unique backdrop where traditional gender norms intersect with modern influences, resulting in complex dynamics and contradictions in men's roles and behaviors.^[7] When addressing men's disadvantages, it is crucial to acknowledge potential concerns that certain commentators may raise regarding the identification of men's disadvantages.^[8] Focusing on the financial category of the middle-income group, particularly male perspectives, this research aims to comprehend their connection with living spaces, exploring reactions and utilization patterns. Hegemonic masculinities are portrayed through specific idealized male stereotypes defining the concept of "being a man," which historically have encompassed traits such as strength, emotional restraint, aggression, sole provider roles within the family, and minimal involvement in household chores.^[8] So often thought to be the primary earners spending minimal time at home, understanding their behavior becomes crucial. Study highlighted the challenges of homeownership in urban areas like Dhaka and underscores the importance of incorporating male perspectives into housing policies and planning initiatives.^[3] The research seeks to answer specific questions to unveil male perceptions, potentially offering general solutions for mass housing within the middle-income group. These insights may aid in addressing the aspirations and challenges faced by individuals seeking a balance between a desired living standard and practical capabilities, often navigating a state of uncertainty.

OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

Key objectives include gaining insights into the attitudes, preferences, and needs of male members in this demographic regarding their living spaces. In addition, the research seeks to analyze the behavior of male earners, who spend limited time at home, to discern patterns in their interaction with and utilization of living spaces. Another objective is to investigate the challenges encountered by males within the middle-income group in managing their households or any type of works. Ultimately, the project aims to propose recommendations and solutions that enhance the living standards of middle-income individuals, with a specific focus on addressing the challenges and perspectives unique to male members within this demographic.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a dual methodology, utilizing both field surveys and questionnaire surveys to comprehensively address the objectives outlined. The research follows quantitative, qualitative, and descriptive pattern, relying primarily on firsthand data to extract actual factors from real-world scenarios and extrapolate findings to a broader context. The researchers undertake specific steps in this process, including the selection of a study area, determination of sample collection methods and sizes, formulation of relevant questions, and the execution of field surveys and documentation. The research is structured into distinct phases, each contributing to a detailed exploration of the male perspective within the middle-income group concerning domestic realm, as described in the upcoming sections.

SITE AND SAMPLE SIZE SELECTION

The study focuses on two areas within Dhaka city Khilgaon (Ward 1) and Mohammadpur, chosen for their diverse middle-income demographics. Khilgaon, with a 2011 census population of 327,717, an average household size of 4.2, features apartments predominantly ranging from 1,000 to 1,500 sq ft. Mohammadpur, home to 355,843 residents, an average household size of 4.4, includes the Chandrima Model Town, known for its real estate growth and residential units mostly between 1,000 and 1,850 sq ft. Both locations represent a mix of lower-middle, middle, and upper-middle-income groups, making them ideal for studying middle-income housing dynamics.

Convenience sampling was employed for its efficiency in collecting data within Dhaka's dense urban environment. A total of 20 participants (10 from each site) were selected to ensure a manageable and focused sample. The sample size, determined by data saturation, ensures comprehensive insights into male housing perspectives. This approach balances time and resource constraints while addressing the study's objectives effectively. For the scheduled interviews and field survey in February 2024, a set of carefully crafted questionnaires has been prepared to enhance our understanding of the participants. The questions, detailed in the next section, have been formulated in both Bengali and English.

CATEGORY SELECTION

The study area survey presents a diverse demographic profile of survey participants from Dhaka's middle-income group, highlighting variations in age, religion, migration status, housing, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Study Area 01 shows a majority aged 32–45, with 66.7% being migrants, and 77.8% residing in multi-storied buildings, of which 66.7%

are homeowners. Conversely, study area 02 participants are mostly aged 56–65, with 90% being migrants and 90% owning apartments. Both areas show family sizes ranging from small to large, predominantly married respondents, and diverse occupations spanning government, private, business, and academia. This demographic diversity provides comprehensive insights into the housing experiences and perspectives of Dhaka’s middle-income men.

QUESTIONNAIRES’ SURVEY AND FINDINGS

The findings of the questionnaire can be seen below in the form of a Chart 1 summarizing the proportion of answers to each question as follows, along with their demand, comment, and limitations on the particular topic. The sample population was asked 17 questions about the research topic. The sample size was $n = 20$. Among the sample, different age range and occupational range of people were questioned. 10 specific survey questions and result are shown in Chart 1.

FINDINGS OF QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

The survey reveals a nuanced understanding of middle-income males’ perspectives in Dhaka concerning their residential spaces. Participants expressed a strong desire for tranquility and relaxation within their homes, favoring activities such as watching TV and reading, which reflect a preference for immersive leisure experiences. Privacy was highly valued, particularly in personal spaces like bedrooms.

Work-related needs highlighted the importance of comfort and flexibility, with 55.8% favoring seating or couch setups for home workspaces. Challenges such as space limitations and noise pollution emphasized the need for a distraction-free environment. Recommendations for open kitchens, expanded family areas, and refreshing residential designs demonstrate a focus on fostering communal living and family interaction.

Recreational preferences prioritized family time (65.5%) and underscored the importance of designated recreation areas, reflecting a balance between individual and collective activities. Sentiments about current residential layouts ranged from satisfaction to neutrality or dissatisfaction, with calls for changes such as improved bedroom ventilation and noise reduction signaling a desire for serenity and well-being.

Flexibility emerged as a central theme, with participants advocating for adaptable spaces to meet evolving needs. These findings underscore a complex relationship between middle-income males and their living environments, driven by aspirations for harmony, adaptability, and meaningful

experiences. The insights offer valuable guidance for designing residential spaces that align with the aspirations and emotional needs of this demographic.

FINDINGS OF FIELD SURVEY

The field survey in study areas 1 and 2 revealed key insights into male residents’ use and perception of domestic spaces. Male individuals primarily occupy living areas, family rooms (if available), and bedrooms, with leisure activities often centered around watching TV. Elderly males face limited leisure options and small verandas, frequently utilizing living and dining areas, even for prayer. Spatial constraints and guest accommodations strain privacy and available areas, negatively impacting quality of life.

Earning male members encounter challenges in accessing restful spaces and often resort to mobile devices for recreation due to shared living room usage. The lack of designated spaces for prayer, rest, and work, coupled with closed layouts and inadequate zoning, highlights the limitations of current housing designs. Adequate space proportional to family size was found to enhance leisure opportunities and customization for male residents. However, smaller activity zones for men compared to women underscore a disparity in homemaking support. These findings provide valuable insights into the housing needs of middle-income males in Dhaka, informing future design and planning efforts.

VISUAL CONTROL AND PRIVACY ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

From study areas, some residential flats were taken for further space analysis and user perspective analysis. For example, three cases been shown. Figure 1 shows plan of a 1200 sq ft apartment, three-bedroom, family living, and living dining as

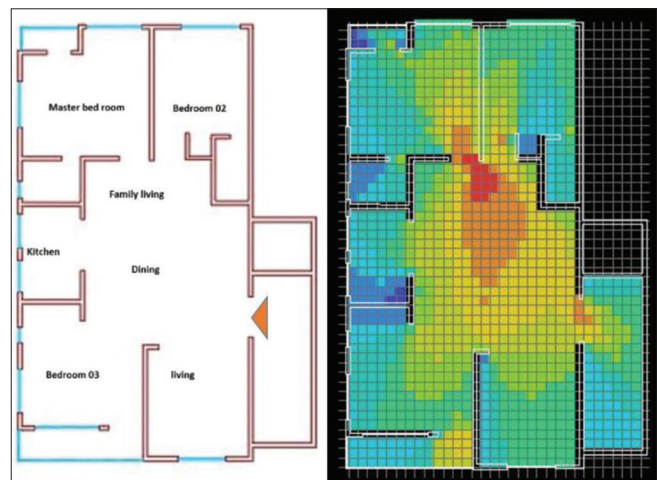


Figure 1: Plan AA and visibility control and privacy plan AA

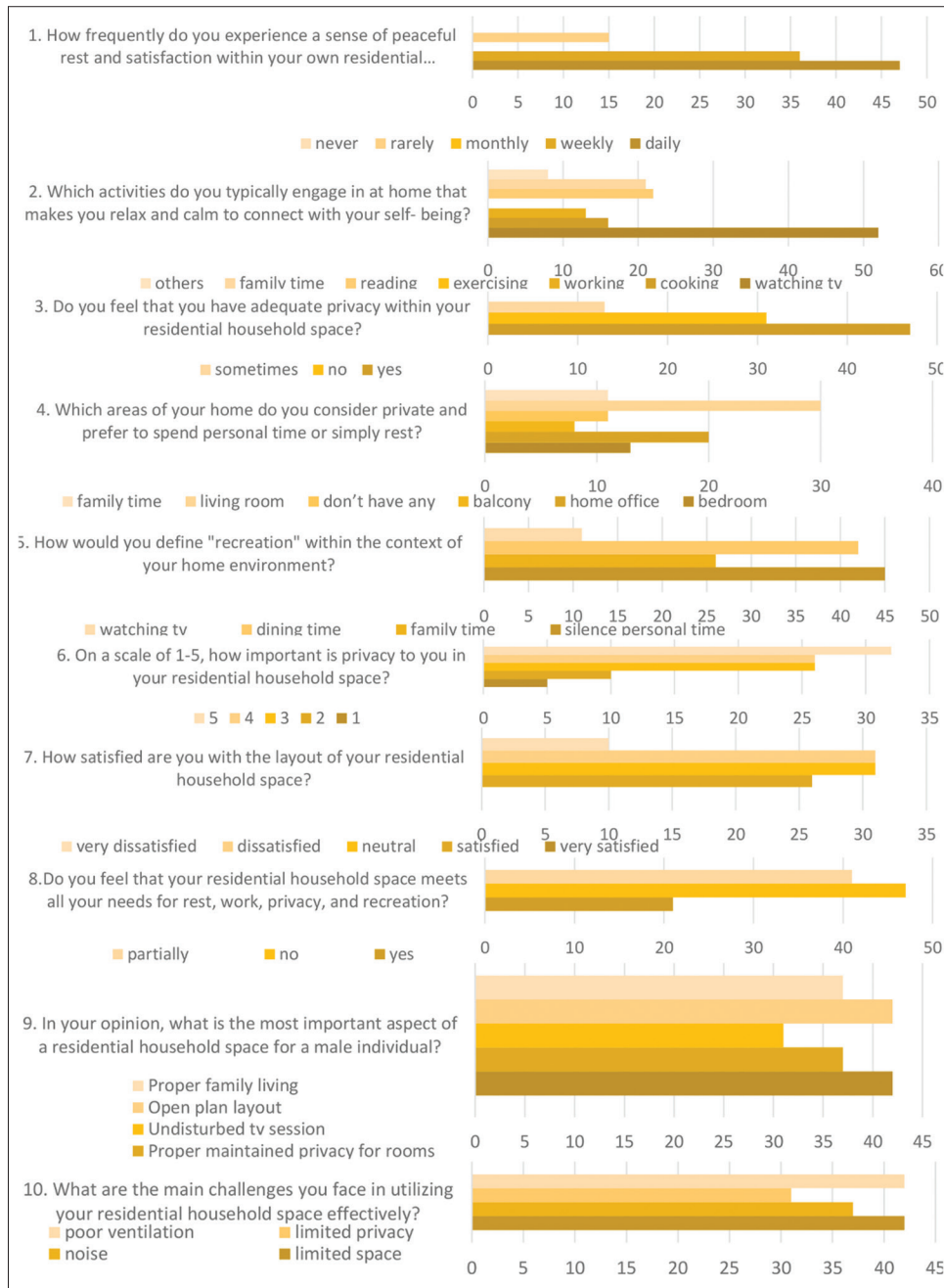


Chart 1: Response analysis for attendant's experience of the challenging household issues

a usable area for recreation and relaxing activity with seven family members, Figure 1^[9] among them two male members, one is retired another working person. The analysis and findings are shown in Figure 1 and Chart 2.

The survey and subsequent analysis revealed that male members of the household predominantly spend their time in areas such as the living room, family living area, dining room, and master bedroom. Often, they conduct their official work in the dining or living zones. Figure 1 and Chart 2 clearly illustrate that male users experience a lack of privacy compared to their

preferences. Furthermore, it is evident that the family living area is inadequately designed to fulfill its intended purpose. The male user often finds himself having to carry out his tasks in public or highly visible areas, and even perform his prayers in the living room, which is also used for TV viewing, dining, and other familial activities. This multi-functional use of space indicates a shortage of personal space for the male user.

Another study showed in Figure 2 Plan BB^[9] 650 sq ft apartment having master bedroom, study or guest room (multifunctional), living and dining, and three adult members among one male

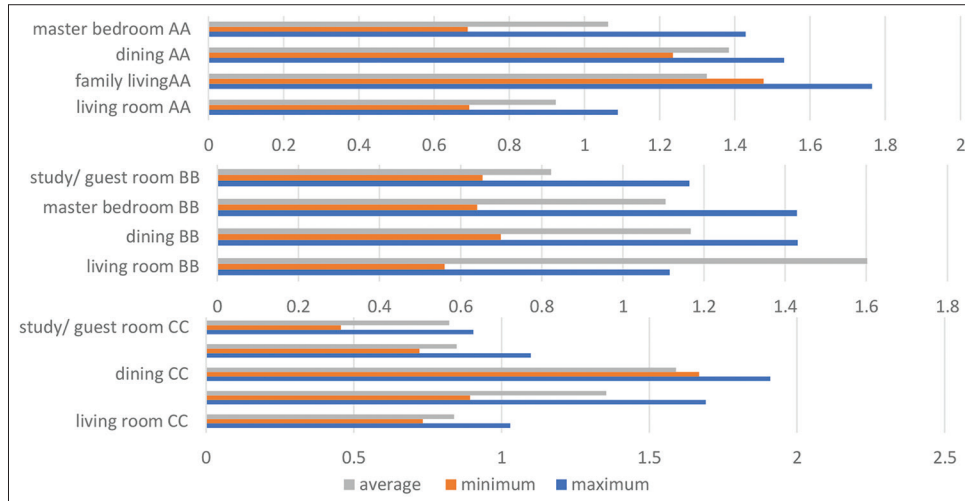


Chart 2: Visual control and privacy analysis of plan AA

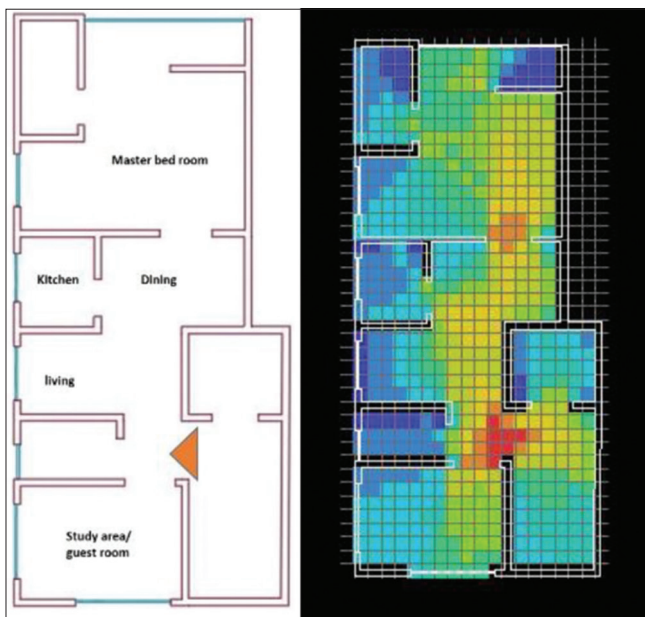


Figure 2: Plan BB and visibility control and privacy plan BB

member, one toddler. The analysis and findings are shown in Figure 2 and Chart 2.

According to the study and survey findings, male member frequently allocates his time to the master bedroom for rest, occasionally utilizing the study room for private relaxation, particularly when the master bedroom is occupied or utilized for childcare purposes. The study room offers a relatively secluded environment, making it conducive for both work and relaxation, especially considering the presence of toddlers in the master bedroom. In contrast, the living area is deemed overly public, lacking the solitude needed for solitary activities, and often proving too congested for comfortable movement or productivity. Consequently, male individuals tend to gravitate

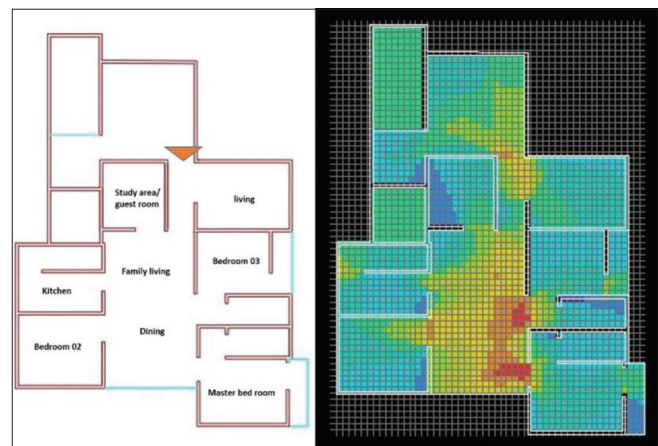


Figure 3: Plan CC and visibility control and privacy plan CC

toward the study room for personal tasks and moments of solitude. However, when guests arrive, the dynamics of the entire household layout shift, leading to discomfort for the male resident in terms of finding adequate rest or working during night shifts, particularly due to the limited space available in the small private study area cum guest room.

The study plan designated as plan CC outlines an apartment spanning 2000 sq ft, featuring designated areas for male members' activities. These spaces include the living room, family living room, dining area, master bedroom, and a study room. The family unit typically consists of three members but occasionally expands to four with the arrival of another male child. The primary male figure, aged 53, holds a government position, indicating a structured work schedule and potentially significant time spent at home. The analysis and findings are shown in Figure 3 and Chart 2.

The survey highlights that male residents prioritize the master bedroom for rest due to its privacy and comfort, while the

family living area fosters recreation and bonding. Study areas provide functional personal workspaces, though congestion issues can arise. The living room is perceived as too public for solitary activities and often lacks adequate privacy. Guest visits further strain household dynamics, disrupting rest and work, particularly in homes with limited private study spaces. These findings emphasize the need for improved domestic space design to balance privacy and functionality for male household members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance male members' privacy, activity, and preferences in residential settings, designs should incorporate multi-functional spaces with sliding partitions or movable furniture for adaptability, addressing diverse needs as highlighted by Magdziak.^[10] Well-defined zoning, including private corners or individual workspaces within shared areas, is crucial for solitude and focus, as noted by Tomah *et al.*^[11] Dedicated workspaces such as home offices or study rooms should include ergonomic furniture, adequate lighting, and minimal distractions to boost productivity.^[12] The master bedroom should prioritize comfort and privacy through features such as soundproofing, blackout curtains, and ample storage, creating a restful retreat. Collaborative input from male residents during the design process ensures spaces align with their unique needs and lifestyles, ultimately enhancing their well-being.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights the importance of addressing male members' privacy and activity space in domestic or residential settings through architectural design considerations. By examining various factors such as space utilization, functionality, and user preferences, this study provides valuable insights into the complexities of creating conducive living environments for male residents. Through the implementation of flexible design elements, well-defined activity zones, and collaborative design processes, architects can effectively enhance the quality of life for male occupants. The incorporation of multi-functional spaces, designated work areas, and optimized master bedrooms underscores the

significance of tailored design solutions in meeting the diverse needs of male residents. Moving forward, further research and practical application of these findings can contribute to the development of more inclusive and user-centric residential environments that promote comfort, privacy, and well-being for all occupants.

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