



A Multidimensional Examination of Social Security in Urban Environments: Emphasizing Physical, Social, and Institutional–Governance Factors (Case Study: Azadshahr Neighborhood of Yazd)

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Abstract

Background and Aim: Rapid physical and social transformations in Iranian cities over recent decades have rendered neighborhood social security a multidimensional and complex phenomenon, necessitating simultaneous analysis of spatial attributes, social relations, and institutional mechanisms. This study aims to conduct a multidimensional analysis of social security and evaluate the explanatory power of physical, social, and institutional-governance dimensions in the Azadshahr neighborhood of Yazd.

Methodology: Employing a sequential mixed-methods exploratory-explanatory design, the research was implemented in two phases. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with residents, security experts, and urban specialists, followed by thematic analysis to identify context-specific indicators of social security. In the quantitative phase, data were collected from 367 residents and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM).

Results and Findings: Results indicated that the proposed model exhibited satisfactory fit, with all three dimensions—physical, social, and institutional-governance—exerting statistically significant positive effects on social security. The social dimension emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.56$, $t = 11.74$, $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.57$), driven particularly by neighborly relations, social capital, and a sense of belonging and ownership. The physical dimension demonstrated a moderate-to-strong effect ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 4.21$; $R^2 = 0.23$), with the highest correlations observed for public space design and lighting. Although the institutional-governance dimension was significant ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 3.98$; $R^2 = 0.19$), it exhibited the weakest direct influence. Collectively, the integrated model accounted for 63% of the variance in social security. These findings underscore that social security in the studied neighborhood is fundamentally a socio-perceptual phenomenon, contingent upon local cohesion, trust, and participatory dynamics rather than purely physical or supervisory measures. Consequently, strategies to enhance urban security—particularly in Iran’s medium-sized cities—should prioritize strengthening social capacities and local capital, complemented by physical restructuring and improvements in the quality of local governance.

Keywords: Social security, physical factors, social factors, institutional-governance factors, structural equation modeling, Azadshahr, Yazd.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

Social security is a fundamental pillar of urban livability and a key determinant of residents' quality of life. It emerges from the dynamic interaction among physical, social, and institutional-governance dimensions. Despite extensive literature on these individual dimensions, there remains a significant gap regarding integrated models that quantify their relative explanatory power for social security in urban neighborhoods. In the Iranian context—especially in neighborhoods such as Azadshahr in Yazd, characterized by physical deterioration, high in-migration, and social heterogeneity—developing a multidimensional model is essential. This research addresses the lack of empirical studies simultaneously assessing physical, social, and institutional-governance dimensions using structural equation modeling. The objective is to construct a localized multidimensional model of social security, identify the most influential dimension, and provide evidence-based insights for neighborhood-level planning and governance.

Methodology

This research adopted a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to ensure methodological rigor and comprehensive understanding. In the qualitative phase, 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted with neighborhood residents, urban planning experts, and security specialists. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis framework, supported by NVivo software. A total of 274 initial codes were extracted, categorized into 13 subthemes, and further consolidated into four overarching themes: physical factors, social factors, institutional-governance factors, and social security outcomes. These findings guided the development of a structured quantitative survey instrument. In the quantitative phase, 367 residents were randomly selected from a total population of 8,547 individuals to participate in a structured survey consisting of 61 researcher-developed items measured on a five-point Likert scale. Content validity was confirmed by experts (CVI=0.91; CVR=0.89), and construct validity and reliability were rigorously assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) within AMOS. Cronbach's alpha values ranged between 0.74 and 0.81, and composite reliability (CR = 0.82–0.90) indicated satisfactory internal consistency. Model fit indices demonstrated excellent fit for both measurement and structural models (CFI=0.95, TLI=0.94, RMSEA=0.058, SRMR=0.044). To examine the comparative effects of each dimension, separate structural equation models (SEMs) were developed to assess explanatory power (R^2) and standardized effects (β) of physical, social, and institutional-governance factors on overall social security. This integrated approach allowed for robust evaluation of the interplay among multiple determinants.

Results and Findings

All three dimensions—physical, social, and institutional-governance—showed positive and significant effects on social security ($p < 0.001$), although with different magnitudes. The social dimension exhibited the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.56$; $R^2 = 0.57$). Variables such as neighborhood relations, social capital, sense of belonging, and community participation emerged as the most influential predictors. The physical dimension ranked second ($\beta = 0.31$; $R^2 = 0.23$), highlighting the importance of lighting, public spaces, land-use mix, and housing conditions. The institutional-governance dimension had the weakest but still significant

impact ($\beta = 0.29$; $R^2 = 0.19$). Neighborhood management and municipal services demonstrated stronger impacts than mere police presence or formal surveillance. These findings indicate that social security cannot be achieved solely through physical interventions. Rather, it requires strengthening neighborhood-level social cohesion, enhancing informal social control, and improving governance practices. The results also align with contemporary CPTED theory, emphasizing that sustainable security outcomes arise from harmonizing environmental design, community capacity building, and local governance mechanisms.

Conclusion

This study, by presenting a multidimensional model, demonstrated that social security in the Azadshahr neighborhood of Yazd results from the dynamic interaction among three dimensions: physical, social, and institutional–governance. Among these, the social dimension plays a predominant role. Consequently, urban policies should move beyond single-dimensional approaches and adopt integrated interventions that simultaneously enhance social capital, neighborly relations, and neighborhood governance, alongside physical improvements. Ultimately, the study underscores a paradigm shift from infrastructure-centered strategies toward comprehensive, community-oriented frameworks that prioritize sociability, inclusiveness, and participatory governance, highlighting the crucial role of social cohesion and institutional effectiveness in ensuring sustainable urban security.

Declarations

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