



Original Article (Qualitative)

The role of education and proactive protection of vulnerable groups based on neighborhood-based security governance

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the role of pre-event education and protection of vulnerable groups based on neighborhood-centered security governance. Given its objective, the research is applied, and in terms of implementation, it is qualitative with a data-driven (grounded theory) approach. The study population consisted of 18 participants, including experts in social security and criminology (university professors and urban security researchers), local actors (members of neighborhood social councils, local trusted figures, and civic activists), and officials from executive and law-enforcement institutions related to urban security, who were selected through purposive snowball sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with experts in social security, local officials, and citizens residing in high-risk areas; interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Data were analyzed using grounded theory. The findings indicate that neighborhood-centered security governance—through three main components, namely “multilevel participation,” “neighborhood-level data-driven management,” and “local institution-building”—can provide the conditions for active, rapid, and effective protection of vulnerable groups. By leveraging neighborhood-based structures, it is possible to support vulnerable groups before crises occur and to enhance neighborhood resilience through pre-event policymaking.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Traditional security systems have primarily focused on responding to crises after their occurrence; however, complex changes in social structures and the growing expansion of economic inequalities have caused contemporary security approaches to shift their focus toward prevention. In this context, vulnerable groups, including older adults, children, female-headed households, migrants, and residents of deteriorated urban areas, are more exposed than others to multilayered threats. Pre-event protection refers to the preservation and safeguarding of the rights and interests of individuals or institutions before the occurrence of incidents or problems. This concept is of particular importance in security and law-enforcement organizations such as the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran, since personnel in such institutions are exposed to various harms and risks due to the sensitive and dangerous nature of their duties (Mohammadpour & Adibi, 2023). The effective implementation of protective measures can contribute to increasing public trust in legal institutions, which in turn strengthens social order. By adopting preventive measures, the occurrence of crimes and social harms can be prevented, ultimately leading to a reduction in social and economic costs (Nazemi et al., 2022). Vulnerable groups refer to segments of society that, due to economic, physical, psychological, social, or cultural conditions, are subject to greater threats and receive less support. These include older adults, working children, individuals with physical or mental disabilities, unsupported women, migrants, and residents of informal settlements (Torabi et al., 2022). Neighborhood-centered security, as a socio-military strategy, plays a key role in ensuring security and confronting internal threats. In this regard, neighborhood-centered security constitutes a model through which community-based security frameworks can serve as an effective approach to crisis management and security theory (Elhami & Riahi-Asl, 2024). Accordingly, the present study seeks to answer the following question: What is the role of pre-event education and protection of vulnerable groups based on neighborhood-centered security governance?

Theoretical Framework

Pre-Event Protection

Pre-event protection refers to a set of measures designed and implemented with the aim of preventing the emergence of crises, threats, and harms. In this approach, rather than focusing solely on reactive measures, efforts are directed toward the early identification of warning signs and threat bottlenecks in order to facilitate effective intervention before incidents occur. This perspective is closely associated with concepts such as “social prevention,” “situational prevention,” and “collective resilience” (Shahrokhi, 2024).

Vulnerable Groups

The term vulnerable groups refers to segments of society that possess lower levels of resilience and capacity in dealing with economic, cultural, and social problems and consequently experience lower levels of security compared with other members of society (Torabi et al., 2022).

Neighborhood-Centered Security Governance

Neighborhood-centered security governance refers to a community-based approach to urban security management in which safety is achieved at the local level through the active participation of residents and neighborhood institutions. The primary objective of this approach is to enhance citizens' sense of security and reduce crime by fostering collaboration and synergy among law enforcement agencies, local communities, and other relevant stakeholders. As a socio-security strategy, neighborhood-centered security plays a pivotal role in maintaining public safety and addressing internal security threats. It also provides an



effective framework for crisis management and the development of participatory security models (Elhami & Riahi-Asl, 2024).

Elhami and Riahi-Asl (2024) examined neighborhood-centered security during the Sacred Defense period as a model for participatory security governance in the future. Their findings demonstrated that public participation in neighborhood security can strengthen national defensive capacity and enhance preparedness against emerging threats. The study concluded that neighborhood-centered security models, emphasizing community engagement and public mobilization, serve as key drivers of resilience and resistance to security threats and can therefore provide an effective framework for managing future crises.

Shahrokhi (2024) investigated the necessity of pre-event protection of personnel, organizational missions, and institutions, with particular emphasis on the concept, significance, rationale, and implementation of preventive protection within the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The study concluded that safeguarding personnel and organizational integrity represents one of the most critical internal missions of the organization. Owing to the diversity of their responsibilities, extensive public interaction, and the highly sensitive nature of their duties, law enforcement personnel are exposed to numerous occupational and social risks. Consequently, protecting and guiding personnel constitutes an essential factor in achieving organizational objectives. Furthermore, the study emphasized that the importance of protection extends beyond organizational considerations, drawing on religious teachings that encourage individuals to safeguard themselves against potential harms. Adherence to these principles not only promotes personal well-being but also contributes to stronger social institutions and more resilient organizations.

Research Methodology

The present study is **applied** in terms of its objective and **qualitative** in terms of its method of implementation, adopting a **data-driven grounded theory approach**. The research population consisted of **18 participants**, including experts in social security and criminology such as university professors and urban security researchers, local actors such as members of neighborhood social councils, trusted community figures, and civic activists, as well as officials from executive and law-enforcement institutions related to urban security. Participants were selected through **purposive snowball sampling**.

Data were collected through **semi-structured interviews** conducted with experts in social security, local officials, and citizens residing in high-risk areas. The interview process continued until **theoretical saturation** was achieved.

Research Findings

Grounded theory was utilized for data analysis. The findings indicate that neighborhood-centered security governance, through three main components—"multi-level participation," "neighborhood-level data-driven management," and "local institution-building"—is capable of providing the conditions for active, rapid, and effective protection of vulnerable groups. By leveraging neighborhood-based structures, it is possible to support vulnerable groups before crises occur and to enhance neighborhood resilience through pre-event policymaking.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of examining the role of education and pre-event protection of vulnerable groups based on neighborhood-centered security governance. The findings of this research are consistent with those reported by Elhami and Riahi-Asl (2024), Shahrokhi (2024), Mohammadpour and Adibi (2023), Smith (2022), Nazemi et al. (2022), Bayari et al. (2020), Bako et al. (2020), and Ghasempour et al. (2019). Ghasempour et



al. (2019) showed that employee training, monitoring and control, public education, and cooperation with governmental and local institutions have a positive and significant effect on the implementation of neighborhood-centered security plans among citizens in the Fifth Police District of the Greater Tehran Law Enforcement Command.

Based on the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Developing a policy document for neighborhood-centered security governance: With the participation of institutions such as the Ministry of Interior, law enforcement agencies, municipalities, and the State Welfare Organization, a comprehensive policy document for social security governance should be formulated with a focus on vulnerable neighborhoods.
- Establishing neighborhood vulnerability monitoring centers (CRM): Data-driven centers should be launched at the neighborhood level with the aim of identifying and continuously monitoring the status of vulnerable groups and critical areas.
- Empowering neighborhood civil structures: Local civil and community-based structures should be strengthened to improve participation, coordination, and support for vulnerable populations before crises occur.