

The Impact of Urban Fabric on the Formation of Criminal Thought: A Study of the Traditional and Modern Fabric of Yazd

Amirmohammad. Taraz^{1*}, Mohammadhossein. Zarei², Mohammadmehdi. Barghi^{Error! Reference source not found.}

¹ Ph.D student in Criminal Law and Criminology at Aras International Campus, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

² Aras International Campus, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

* Corresponding author email address: Mhzarie@ut.ac.ir

Received: 2025-06-01

Revised: 2025-03-04

Accepted: 2025-03-13

Published: 2025-12-01

Yazd, a city that gazes into the past through its adobe alleyways while embracing the future through its modern streets, serves as a stage for interrogating the question of how urban fabric delineates criminal thought. This study, employing a legal and in-depth perspective, explores this dichotomy through qualitative methodologies, including in-depth interviews, structured questionnaires, and field observations. The findings indicate that the traditional urban fabric, with its high walls and strong neighborhood ties, acts as a steadfast guardian against criminal inclinations, although its dimly lit spaces and concealed corners occasionally provide opportunities for transgression. In contrast, the modern urban fabric, with its open streets and fragmented social cohesion, fosters anonymity, creating an environment conducive to criminal behavior, although its exposure to light and broader visibility at times function as deterrents, akin to an impartial judge. Drawing upon criminological theories such as the broken windows theory and the opportunity theory of crime, this study underscores the necessity of legal regulations in urban planning—laws that integrate the illumination of traditional alleyways with intelligent surveillance in modern neighborhoods to ensure justice and security. Yazd, in its transition from past to present, is not only a city to be preserved but also a mirror reflecting the possibility of a safer future.

Keywords: *Urban fabric; Criminal thought; Urban design; Crime prevention; Traditional fabric; Modern fabric*

How to cite this article:

Taraz, A., Zarei, M., & Barghi, M. (2026). The Impact of Urban Fabric on the Formation of Criminal Thought: A Study of the Traditional and Modern Fabric of Yazd. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Society, Law, and Politics*, 5(3), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.61838/kman.isslp.4.4.29>

1. Introduction

In the winding alleys of the city, where bricks converse with the soil and walls safeguard the secrets of generations, and in the expanse of emerging streets, where iron and glass echo the voice of modernity, a question arises that challenges the mind: Can the environment in which a person lives influence their thoughts toward darkness? The urban fabric, this invisible weave that envelops human life, serves not only as a shelter for the body but also as a mirror for the psyche and a foundation for human actions. In this context, criminal thought—that ominous shadow that

sometimes infiltrates the recesses of the mind—raises the question of whether it emerges from within these very structures. Yazd, a historical city in the heart of Iran, offers a suitable case for this research due to its traditional urban fabric, registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the expansion of modern areas in recent decades. The traditional fabric of Yazd, with its narrow alleys, windcatchers, and cohesive neighborhoods, represents the architecture and culture of the past, whereas its modern fabric, characterized by wide streets, new buildings, and demographic shifts, reflects contemporary transformations. This duality



makes Yazd a natural laboratory for studying the influence of urban environments on behavior.

Yazd, with its two distinct faces, appears as a courtroom where tradition and modernity stand trial against each other. The traditional urban fabric, with its enduring social cohesion and the watchful oversight of neighborhood ties, contrasts with the modern fabric, which, with its openness and fragmentation, sometimes provides spaces for individuals to hide. From a legal perspective, crime is not merely an act prohibited by law; it is a process formed in the mind, and the environment, like an unwritten decree, can act as either the accused or the defense in this process. The central question here is whether the physical and social differences between these two urban fabrics—one rooted in history and the other flourishing in the present—play a role in shaping criminal thought. Do narrow alleys and high walls, by fostering a sense of belonging and surveillance, act as barriers against crime, or do wide, faceless streets, through anonymity and social detachment, sow the seeds of criminal opportunities? How do the physical and social characteristics of Yazd's traditional and modern urban fabrics influence tendencies toward criminal behavior? Do structural differences between these two environments contribute to crime opportunities or aid in its prevention? What lessons can be drawn from this comparison to improve urban design for crime reduction?

This study seeks to meticulously examine this dichotomy and uncover answers to these fundamental questions from a legal and social perspective by exploring the roots of criminal thought in the urban environment. The primary objective is to analyze the impact of urban fabric on the formation of criminal thought, focusing on the comparison between the traditional and modern areas of Yazd. Yazd, with these contrasting yet complementary urban fabrics, serves as an open book, revealing how the environment—this silent judge—can shape human behavior. Investigating the impact of urban environments on human behavior, particularly in the field of criminology, is of critical importance, as it can inform effective policies in urban planning and crime prevention. Understanding this relationship not only enhances comprehension of crime's underlying causes but also provides practical solutions for its mitigation. Yazd, as a city with a rich history yet undergoing modern development, presents an ideal case for this

examination, allowing for the simultaneous observation of the influences of both tradition and modernity within a unified cultural context.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The city, as the pulse of life and a reflection of thought, is more than a mere collection of stone and brick; it is an arena where humans and their environment engage in a continuous dialogue. The urban fabric, with all its physical and social complexities, is not just a space for living but a framework for shaping behavior and thought. Within this context, criminal thought—that concealed whisper within the mind—sometimes emerges from the very interaction between humans and their surroundings, where opportunities, constraints, or even the shadows cast by the city act as an invisible hand guiding human actions. The inseparable link between human behavior and the environment forms the foundation of this study, as every alley, every street, every source of light, and every dark corner can either serve as a guardian of the law or, in silence, become an accomplice to wrongdoing (Karimi, 2023).

Studies conducted in cities such as Chicago and London have demonstrated that areas with high population density and strong social ties tend to marginalize crime, where neighbors act as vigilant observers of their communities. In contrast, research on modern and sprawling suburban areas has indicated an increase in crime due to social fragmentation and poor urban design, where empty streets and anonymous buildings provide opportunities for criminals to operate unnoticed. In Iran, sporadic research has examined these issues, but few studies have undertaken a comparative analysis of two distinct urban fabrics within a single city (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sharifi, 2021).

Yazd, with all its unique characteristics, has received little attention in this field. While some studies have examined crime in its peripheral neighborhoods, a systematic comparison between its two primary urban fabrics remains largely unexplored. This research gap motivates the present study to draw upon both global and local experiences to provide a fresh perspective on Yazd and investigate how tradition and modernity each cast their own influence on the thoughts and behaviors of its residents. This review not only lays the foundation for the study's analysis but also demonstrates how Yazd, with its duality, can offer new answers to longstanding

questions. Previous research across the world has examined the relationship between urban environments and crime. Studies have indicated that dense, traditional urban fabrics, with their strong social cohesion, often act as shields against crime, whereas modern areas, with their spatial dispersion and social detachment, sometimes become grounds for criminal opportunities. However, Yazd, with its distinctive characteristics, remains relatively unexamined in this context, necessitating further research to build upon previous findings and advance knowledge in this domain (Felson & Clarke, 1998; Rezai, 2019).

In the broad scope of criminology, theories act as guiding stars illuminating the path to understanding. Wilson and Kelling's Broken Windows Theory posits that small signs of disorder—such as a broken window left unrepaired—send a message of neglect and weak social control to the community, effectively inviting further and more severe criminal activities. A single defaced wall or scattered garbage, left unchecked, may trigger a chain reaction of lawlessness. Similarly, the Opportunity Theory of Crime, rooted in the works of Marcus Felson and Ronald Clarke, argues that crime is not solely a product of criminal intent but also arises from opportunities presented by the urban environment. A secluded corner, a dimly lit street, or a broken lock may all serve as catalysts for criminal behavior (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1991; Cozens, 2008; Felson & Clarke, 1998; Mohammadi, 2020; Taghvaei & Kiani, 2017; Wilson & Kelling, 1982; Yazdani, 2022).

These criminological theories, each offering a unique perspective on the relationship between urban environments and behavior, provide the conceptual framework for this study. In Yazd's traditional urban fabric, does social cohesion and neighborhood surveillance act as a vigilant guardian against crime? Conversely, does the modern fabric, with its spatial disconnection and anonymity, create pathways for criminal opportunities? Here, the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Theory also becomes relevant, suggesting that through strategic urban design—including improved lighting, enhanced visibility, and the strengthening of collective ownership over spaces—crime rates can be reduced.

3. Characteristics of the Urban Fabric of Yazd

3.1. *The Traditional Urban Fabric of Yazd: Structure, Architecture, and Social Features*

The traditional urban fabric of Yazd, like a living treasure of the past, breathes through its narrow and mud-brick alleys. Here, windcatchers stand tall as vigilant guardians on rooftops, while the earthen walls, with every crack and mark they bear, whisper stories of bygone days. This urban structure, with its twists and turns, has not only adapted to the arid desert climate but has also provided a foundation for communal living. Narrow alleys, sometimes so tight that only one person can barely pass through, and central courtyards in houses, which serve as concealed hearts of family life, are defining features of this architectural landscape. This design, offering shade and coolness, serves not just as a refuge for the body but also as a sanctuary for the soul.

From a social perspective, the traditional fabric of Yazd exhibits unparalleled cohesion. Neighborhoods, interconnected like woven threads, are linked by mosques and Hussainiyas, where collective supervision flows as an invisible force. Here, every neighbor keeps a watchful eye on the other, and this interconnectedness has often acted as a shield against social deviance. These characteristics, deeply rooted in culture and tradition, make the traditional fabric of Yazd resemble a microcosm where human beings and their environment continuously shape one another (Sharifi, 2021).

Yazd, a city that observes its past through its adobe alleys while embracing its future through modern streets, serves as a stage for questioning how urban fabric influences criminal thought. Findings indicate that the traditional fabric, with its high walls and strong neighborhood ties, acts as a steadfast barrier against criminal inclinations, although its dimly lit spaces and hidden corners occasionally provide opportunities for transgression. In contrast, the modern urban fabric, with its wide streets and fragmented social bonds, fosters anonymity, creating an environment conducive to criminal behavior, although its open visibility sometimes functions as a deterrent, akin to an impartial judge.

The traditional urban fabric of Yazd appears as a piece of history, preserved and thriving amidst the desert—an urban landscape where every brick and alley narrates tales of the past. This fabric is remarkable not only for its architectural beauty but also for the profound

interaction between its physical structure and the social life of its inhabitants. Every wall, windcatcher, and passageway embodies the identity of a people who have endured the desert's relentless winds for centuries. The structure of Yazd's traditional fabric represents a highly intelligent response to the harsh and arid climate. Narrow and winding alleys, sometimes less than a meter wide—such as those in the Fahadan or Sahl bin Ali neighborhoods—function like narrow veins connecting different quarters. This compactness not only provides cool shade against the relentless sun but also offers protection from the dust-laden desert winds (Mohammadi, 2020).

The high mud-brick walls, sometimes reaching up to three meters, fortify the privacy of homes like impenetrable fortresses, shielding them from the gaze of outsiders. Windcatchers, these ingenious structures, rise toward the sky in houses such as the Lari House or the Rasoulia House, serving as masterpieces of traditional engineering. By channeling breezes into the interior, they create a cooling effect, symbolizing humanity's harmony with nature. Homes typically feature central courtyards, as seen in the historic Aghazadeh House in Abarkuh (near Yazd), where rooms are arranged around an enclosed courtyard, fostering a secure and familial atmosphere. This arrangement, with windows facing inward rather than outward, not only ensures privacy but also enhances security by limiting direct access from the street (Sharifi, 2021).

The materials used are sourced directly from the desert: sun-dried mud bricks, molded by hand, and clay, mixed with the region's scarce water, form walls that are both environmentally harmonious and remarkably durable over time. This high-density structure has created a compact, interconnected space that envelops the city like a unified entity.

In this urban fabric, social life pulsates like warm currents flowing through the veins of its alleys. Neighborhood cohesion, deeply embedded in cultural and traditional values, forms the backbone of this community. Neighborhoods such as Posht Bagh or Gazargah are interwoven through mosques, Hussainiyas, and water reservoirs like the six-windcatcher Ab Anbar. These places not only fulfill daily needs but also serve as hubs of social interaction. Here, a neighbor is not just an acquaintance; they are a watchful guardian, silently ensuring the well-being of the community. For example,

in a narrow alley, if a stranger enters, the curious gaze of residents or the sound of a door opening reveals their presence. This collective surveillance is heightened in marketplaces such as Haj Ghasem Bazaar or during religious ceremonies in Hussainiyas, reinforcing a sense of belonging and responsibility among the residents (Yazdani, 2022).

This social interconnectedness acts as a deterrent to crime; if a child misbehaves, the elders recognize and report them to their family, or if a suspicious outsider is spotted, the news spreads swiftly across the neighborhood. However, this cohesion sometimes imposes limitations; local prejudices or familial disputes, such as conflicts over water rights in older districts, can occasionally escalate into minor tensions. Nevertheless, these deeply ingrained traditions and the enduring communal lifestyle transform Yazd's traditional fabric into a world where individuals, their environment, and society are intricately intertwined, completing one another like threads in a tightly woven tapestry.

These structural and social characteristics play a crucial role in shaping or preventing criminal thought within the framework of this study. The narrow alleys and high-density layout, by reducing visibility and limiting access, restrict opportunities for crime, yet their darkness and complexity sometimes provide concealment for minor offenses, such as petty theft in secluded corners. Collective social supervision fosters a sense of ownership and control, suppressing criminal tendencies, but if this oversight turns into social isolation or excessive conservatism, it can itself ignite tensions. The traditional urban fabric of Yazd, with its inherent duality, serves both as a shield against crime and as a setting that invites deeper contemplation of its hidden dimensions.

3.2. The Modern Urban Fabric of Yazd: Urban Development, Physical and Demographic Changes

The modern urban fabric of Yazd appears as an emerging voice rising from the desert, resonating with the rapid pace of contemporary times—a part of the city that no longer breathes beneath windcatchers but under skyscrapers and broad avenues. This fabric, which has expanded in recent decades like a new branch growing from the ancient trunk of Yazd, reflects the transformations that development and contemporary needs have imposed upon the city. Here, modernity has not only reshaped the city's physical appearance but has

also set its inhabitants on a new course—one that sometimes leads to comfort and, at other times, unintentionally casts shadows of unrest.

The modern fabric of Yazd emerged as a result of accelerated development beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, driven by industrialization, migration, and population growth. Wide streets, such as Jomhuri Boulevard or Safaieh Street, have replaced the narrow alleys, providing ample space for vehicles while often relegating pedestrians to the margins. This openness, designed to facilitate urban mobility and accommodate modern needs, has introduced a transparency that has lifted the city from the constraints of its mud-brick past (Mohammadi, 2020).

Buildings—ranging from multi-story apartments in Safaieh to commercial complexes in Azadi Square—now stand tall, constructed from concrete and glass, replacing the central courtyards and high walls of the past. Large windows and balconies, opening onto the street, symbolize a more open and contemporary way of life, yet this openness has also blurred the boundaries of privacy, making visibility accessible to all, including strangers. Public lighting has undergone a transformation, with streetlights illuminating boulevards and plazas, yet some areas, such as open parking lots or secondary alleys near places like Haft Tir Park, remain shrouded in darkness. These physical changes, though aimed at development and comfort, have simultaneously introduced blind spots and defenseless spaces—areas where silence sometimes conceals narratives of wrongdoing (Mohammadi, 2020). With the expansion of the modern fabric, a new demographic has settled in Yazd: migrants from nearby villages and towns, young professionals seeking employment and modern lifestyles, and families relocating from the cramped quarters of old houses to spacious apartments. Districts such as Safaieh or Azadshahr, once barren lands, now host this diverse population. However, this transformation has also disrupted social bonds. In the traditional fabric, neighbors were like close relatives, but here, in apartment buildings and bustling streets, residents often remain strangers (Sharifi, 2021).

These characteristics, within the scope of this study, provide key insights into the impact of the modern urban fabric on criminal thought. While broad streets and open spaces, such as Daneshjoo Boulevard, enhance visibility and can deter crime, isolated parking areas or dimly lit

park corners create opportunities for misconduct. The breakdown of social cohesion and anonymity, prevalent in dispersed neighborhoods such as Azadshahr, diminishes collective responsibility, making it easier for criminal thoughts to take root in solitude.

3.3. Comparison of Traditional and Modern Urban Fabrics in Terms of Design and Function

The traditional and modern urban fabrics of Yazd resemble two brothers originating from the same root but diverging onto separate paths—one deeply embedded in the soil of history, the other gazing toward the sky of the future. This comparison not only highlights the physical and functional differences between the two but also unveils how their design and role cast a shadow on the criminal thought of their inhabitants. Yazd, in its duality, stands as an open book, where each page narrates a story of human-environment interaction—a story that at times leads to security and at other times to unrest (Yazdani, 2022).

The traditional urban fabric, with its narrow and winding alleys, such as those in the Fahadan or Posht Bagh neighborhoods, resembles a fortress sealed against the gaze and access of strangers. These alleys, sometimes less than one meter wide, coupled with mud-brick walls reaching up to three meters in height, create a compact and enclosed space. This design, intended to provide shade and protection from the desert sun, limits visibility and places every movement under the scrutiny of residents. Windcatchers and central courtyards, such as those in the Lari House, not only create a cooling effect but also reinforce privacy by eliminating outward-facing windows. However, lighting is weak; dim lamps or a lack of illumination in remote alleys create shadows that sometimes serve as hiding spots (Sharifi, 2021).

In contrast, the modern urban fabric, with its wide streets such as Jomhuri Boulevard or Kashani Street, appears to have opened the city's lungs. These thoroughfares, designed for vehicular movement and the fast pace of modern life, provide broad visibility and bring transparency. Concrete and glass buildings, such as the apartment complexes in Safaieh, with their large windows and street-facing balconies, have distanced themselves from traditional enclosures. Lighting in squares and boulevards, such as Atlas Square, brightens the night, yet blind spots such as open parking lots or back alleys behind commercial complexes remain in

darkness. This openness and transparency have expanded the city while simultaneously creating defenseless spaces (Yazdani, 2022).

In terms of density, the traditional fabric resembles a tightly woven cloth; houses are closely packed together with minimal distances between them. This compactness makes access difficult but facilitates supervision. In the modern fabric, density is lower; the distances between buildings, such as those in Azadshahr, create empty spaces that sometimes remain out of sight. This difference in design presents two contrasting worlds—one enclosed and protective, the other open and vulnerable (Sharifi, 2021).

The function of the traditional fabric is rooted in collective living and neighborhood centrality. Mosques, Hussainiyas, and bazaars such as Haj Ghasem Bazaar serve as focal points that bring residents together. Here, collective surveillance operates as a living force; in the Gazargah neighborhood, if a stranger enters, inquisitive glances and inquiries follow them. This function strengthens a sense of belonging and responsibility, creating an environment where misconduct is not only observed but also met with collective reaction. However, this cohesion sometimes leads to conservatism or the restriction of individual privacy, as seen in local disputes over minor issues (Yazdani, 2022).

The modern fabric, on the other hand, has an individualistic and dynamic function. Streets and squares, such as Daneshjoo Boulevard, are designed for mobility and commerce rather than for social bonds. Apartment buildings, like isolated islands, keep residents within themselves, reducing interaction. In Safaieh, residents may not even know their next-door neighbors, and this detachment has eroded community supervision. Parks and public spaces, such as Haft Tir Park, are intended for social encounters, but without a sense of collective ownership, they often become transient spaces. This function, which aligns with the rapid pace of modern life, fosters anonymity—a feature that grants both freedom and, at times, indifference.

These differences, within the framework of this research, serve as keys to understanding the impact of urban fabric on criminal thought. In the traditional fabric, enclosed design and high density, by restricting access and reinforcing surveillance, limit opportunities for crime. For instance, theft in a narrow alley such as Sahl bin Ali Alley is difficult due to the watchful eyes of neighbors;

however, in the absence of lighting, the same alley can become a hiding place for minor crimes, such as bicycle theft from an unattended courtyard. The Broken Windows Theory applies here—a cracked wall or an abandoned house, such as those in the Posht Bagh neighborhood, can signal neglect and encourage criminal activity. Collective surveillance acts as a formidable barrier against crime, yet if it turns into excessive conservatism, it may itself spark conflicts.

In the modern fabric, openness and transparency, such as in Jomhuri Boulevard, increase visibility and sometimes expose crime—for instance, pickpocketing in broad daylight is challenging. However, blind spots such as dimly lit parking lots in Azadshahr or secluded corners of Haft Tir Park create opportunities that align with the Opportunity Theory of Crime. Car theft or street altercations are more common in these spaces. The breakdown of social ties and anonymity, which are prominent in apartment complexes and crowded streets, diminish a sense of responsibility and make criminal thought—rooted in solitude and indifference—easier to develop. For example, burglary in an empty unit in Safaieh is facilitated by the absence of a guard or a lack of familiarity among residents.

This comparison reveals that the traditional fabric, with its protective design and communal function, is more effective in crime prevention, though weaknesses such as poor lighting make it vulnerable. The modern fabric, with its open design and individualistic function, increases crime opportunities, although its lighting and visibility sometimes act as deterrents. This duality positions Yazd as a field where urban design and function, like judge and defendant, stand trial against criminal thought.

4. Methodology

4.1. Study Type and Research Approach

This research, like an exploration through the winding paths of the city, is a journey toward understanding the impact of urban fabric on human thought. The study is descriptive-analytical—an approach that not only describes the characteristics of Yazd's traditional and modern fabrics but also analyzes the connection between these characteristics and criminal thought. Since the aim is not merely to understand the current situation but to uncover relationships between variables,

the study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative aspect delves into residents' experiences and perceptions, while the quantitative aspect clarifies patterns through numerical data. This dual-method strategy, like two wings, enables the research to soar toward more comprehensive answers.

The study population consists of the residents of Yazd—those who have breathed in its traditional alleys or walked its modern streets. To capture a clear picture, two primary groups have been considered: residents of the traditional fabric and residents of the modern fabric. The sample size, considering the city's scale and research limitations, is determined using Cochran's formula, but an estimated 200 participants from each fabric—a total of 400 individuals—will be selected. The sampling method is a combination of cluster and purposive sampling: cluster sampling ensures representation from various neighborhoods, while purposive sampling targets individuals with rich lived experiences of the environment. This selection process, like a light illuminating hidden corners of the city, guarantees data diversity and depth.

For data collection, a variety of tools are employed, akin to a gardener carefully selecting different flowers from the soil. First, semi-structured interviews with residents and experts in urban planning and criminology are conducted to obtain first-hand narratives about their lived experiences in these environments. These conversations, like windows into the minds and hearts of people, reveal their perceptions of security and insecurity. Second, standardized questionnaires utilizing Likert scales measure perceptions of safety, social surveillance, and criminal opportunities. This tool, through targeted questions, provides quantifiable data. Third, field observations immerse the researcher in the city's fabric to document lighting conditions, density, and physical characteristics of each urban area. This triad of methods, interwoven like threads in a tapestry, ensures a comprehensive dataset.

4.2. Data Analysis Approach

Analyzing the data and statistical findings allows us to narrate the story of Yazd's urban fabric and its influence on criminal thought: both traditional and modern fabrics play dual roles—one as a deterrent shield, the other as a potential catalyst for crime.

In the traditional fabric, descriptive statistics indicate a high average sense of security (e.g., 4.2 out of 5) with low response variability, reflecting strong neighborhood cohesion. A t-test ($p < 0.05$) confirms that this sense of security is significantly higher compared to the modern fabric (average 3.1). Pearson correlation (0.67) shows that higher alley density correlates with stronger social surveillance, acting as a deterrent against criminal thought. Meanwhile, chi-square tests indicate that in well-lit alleys, only 5 thefts were reported, whereas in 30 dimly lit alleys, 15 incidents occurred. In contrast, the modern fabric, characterized by social detachment and anonymity, exhibits higher crime vulnerability, with regression analysis ($\beta = 0.38$ for anonymity) confirming its role in crime prevalence. Ultimately, these findings suggest that thoughtful urban design can guide Yazd toward enhanced security and stability.

5. Analysis of the Impact of Urban Fabric on Criminal Thought

5.1. The Role of Physical Factors (Architecture, Density, Lighting) in the Formation of Criminal Behavior

The city, through its structure and physical form, serves not only as a shelter for human life but also as a stage where thoughts and behaviors, including criminal thought, take shape—sometimes in the shadows of walls, sometimes under the glow of streetlights. Physical factors such as architecture, density, and lighting in the traditional and modern urban fabrics of Yazd function as invisible forces that can either deter crime or, unintentionally, provide a setting for it. Environmental criminology, through theories such as Broken Windows Theory, Crime Opportunity Theory, and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), examines these factors as witnesses in a legal trial, shedding light on their role in this process.

Architecture defines the identity and functionality of the city. In the traditional urban fabric of Yazd, narrow alleys and high mud-brick walls—reaching up to three meters in buildings like the Rasoulia House—create an enclosed and compact environment. This design, rooted in desert climate adaptation and cultural privacy norms, restricts visibility and limits access for outsiders. From a criminological perspective, this restriction reduces "available targets" (a concept from Crime Opportunity Theory) and thus decreases the likelihood of theft or

unauthorized entry; for example, stealing from a courtyard that is only accessible through a narrow door is significantly more difficult. However, this same enclosure creates dark corners that can serve as hiding spots for offenders. Reports of minor thefts, such as bicycle theft from backyards in the Gazargah neighborhood, indicate that while this architecture is generally a deterrent, it sometimes enables concealment. In the modern urban fabric, architecture has transformed; wide streets and glass-fronted buildings, such as the apartment complexes in Safaieh, create an open and transparent environment. This openness, characterized by large windows and balconies facing the street, expands visibility and, in accordance with CPTED principles, enhances "natural surveillance," making crimes like pickpocketing in broad daylight more difficult. However, this transparency also reduces privacy and increases the visibility of "potential targets"—for instance, burglars can easily identify unoccupied apartments from the street, as seen in reported cases of residential burglaries in Azadshahr. Broken Windows Theory also applies here; a graffiti-covered wall or scattered garbage in a side alley signals neglect, potentially encouraging criminal activity. Density affects urban movement and interactions like the pulse of a city. In the traditional fabric, high density connects homes closely together, forming a compact environment that limits access and strengthens surveillance. Criminologists such as Newman (Defensible Space Theory) argue that this compactness helps reduce crime, as every movement is visible to residents. For instance, a stranger entering a narrow alley flanked by closely built houses is quickly noticed, reducing the likelihood of criminal activity. However, if high density is combined with inadequate lighting, it can have the opposite effect; narrow and dark passages, such as those behind Haj Ghasem Bazaar, sometimes become hideouts for petty theft, aligning with Crime Opportunity Theory predictions.

In contrast, the modern fabric, with its lower density, has increased spatial separation. For example, in Azadshahr, open spaces and uncovered parking lots are common between residential complexes. This spatial dispersion reduces surveillance and creates "defensible voids," a concept emphasized in CPTED. For instance, car thefts in isolated parking areas in Safaieh are more frequent due to their distance from residential buildings. This physical

fragmentation, by reducing human presence, makes criminal thought easier to act upon—offenders know they are less likely to be seen. However, if these spaces were redesigned with features such as shorter walls or enhanced lighting, they could become safer.

Lighting acts as the city's eyes, determining whether an environment feels secure or vulnerable. In the traditional fabric, lighting is often insufficient; remote alleys, such as those in Posht Bagh, are frequently dimly lit or entirely unilluminated. This darkness, resulting from a lack of modern infrastructure, creates shadows that can conceal offenders. Crime Opportunity Theory suggests that poor lighting reduces "the risk of being seen"; for instance, nighttime thefts in the dark alleys of Fahadan—such as burglaries targeting small storage units—are directly linked to this weakness. However, areas near well-lit locations, such as the alleys around Jame Mosque, report fewer crimes, supporting CPTED principles, which identify lighting as a key crime deterrent.

5.2. The Impact of Social Factors (Neighborhood Cohesion, Collective Surveillance) in Traditional and Modern Fabrics

A city is more than just its walls and streets—it lives through the spirit of its residents, shaped by the bonds and glances exchanged between them. Social factors, such as neighborhood cohesion and collective surveillance, form the fabric of a community, either suppressing criminal thought at its root or, inadvertently, enabling its growth. In Yazd, these factors present two contrasting faces in the traditional and modern fabrics—one resembling a vigilant guardian, the other sometimes acting as an indifferent stranger. Criminology, through theories such as Social Disorganization Theory and Defensible Space Theory, examines these dynamics, which this section of the study explores in the context of Yazd.

In the traditional fabric of Yazd, neighborhood cohesion flows through the alleys and districts like lifeblood. Here, residents are not just neighbors but part of a shared identity. This bond is historically and culturally embedded; mosques such as Jame Mosque and Hussainiyas serve as gathering centers, while bazaars such as Haj Ghasem Bazaar are not only spaces for commerce but also venues for social interaction. This cohesion fosters a strong sense of belonging, where each individual feels responsible for their neighborhood—an

example of social networking as an invisible security net. From a criminological perspective, Social Disorganization Theory (Sampson & Groves) suggests that strong cohesion reinforces shared norms and deters deviance.

In traditional Yazd, this social connectedness suppresses criminal thought; for example, burglary in a narrow alley like Sahl bin Ali Alley is rare because residents know each other, making it difficult for a thief to remain anonymous. However, this cohesion can sometimes lead to excessive social control; familial or local disputes—such as conflicts over water rights in older neighborhoods—can escalate into tensions that, while rare, sometimes trigger antisocial behaviors.

Collective surveillance acts as the watchful eyes of this urban fabric. Narrow alleys and closely packed houses, as seen in Fahadan, create a setting where no movement escapes notice. For instance, if a stranger steps into a narrow alley, the sound of doors opening or the curious gaze of residents follows them. This surveillance, which intensifies during religious gatherings or neighborhood events such as mourning ceremonies in Hussainiyas, serves as a natural crime deterrent. Newman's Defensible Space Theory supports this observation—natural surveillance, by fostering a sense of collective ownership, reduces the likelihood of criminal behavior. Reports from the Gazargah neighborhood indicate that petty thefts, such as storage burglaries, tend to occur in less visible alleys, whereas in high-traffic alleys, incidents are rare because "watchful eyes are everywhere." This type of surveillance curtails criminal thought—offenders understand that being seen not only disrupts their actions but also damages their reputation. However, excessive surveillance can also have psychological drawbacks; extreme social control can lead to personal isolation or drive certain offenses, such as drug use, into abandoned houses.

In the modern urban fabric of Yazd, neighborhood cohesion has diminished. Wide streets such as Daneshjoo Boulevard and high-rise apartments such as those in Safaieh have distanced residents from one another. Unlike in the traditional fabric, neighbors in modern areas are often strangers; for instance, in an apartment building on Farrokhi Street, residents on different floors may go months without seeing one another. This detachment, combined with migration, urban life's fast pace, and modern individualism, has

weakened the sense of community. Public spaces, such as Haft Tir Park or Atlas Square, are intended as social hubs but often function more as transient spaces than as points of connection.

Social Disorganization Theory manifests in these areas; when social bonds weaken, shared norms diminish, creating opportunities for deviance. For example, burglaries in vacant apartments are more frequent in Azadshahr, where residents neither know each other nor feel a collective responsibility. This urban solitude makes criminal thought easier to entertain—offenders know that no one is watching or cares enough to intervene.

Collective surveillance in modern Yazd is weak, flickering like a candle in the winds of urban life. Open streets and scattered buildings, such as in Jomhuri Boulevard, provide wide visibility but reduce human presence. Unlike in the traditional fabric, watchful eyes are absent—for example, in open parking lots in Azadshahr, no one observes a stranger's entry. This weakness, combined with anonymity, increases crime opportunities.

Ultimately, criminological analysis confirms that social cohesion and surveillance in the traditional fabric act as chains restraining criminal thought, while detachment and anonymity in the modern fabric unlock its potential. Thus, in Yazd, social factors have a stronger impact on residents' minds than physical structures, underscoring the need for strategic urban planning to restore lost social connections.

5.3. Examining Crime Opportunities in the Two Urban Fabrics

The city, with all its alleys and streets, is not merely a human habitat but also a field of opportunities that can either awaken or suppress criminal thought. Crime Opportunity Theory, which posits that crime emerges from situational factors rather than mere intent, is the key to this section. In Yazd, both the traditional and modern urban fabrics, with their distinct physical and social characteristics, create or reduce crime opportunities—some concealed in the shadows of an alley, others visible in the solitude of an empty street. This criminological examination explores these opportunities in the two urban fabrics and reveals how the city, intentionally or unintentionally, plays a role in shaping criminal behavior.

At first glance, Yazd's traditional urban fabric, with its narrow and winding alleys, appears to be an obstacle to crime. High density and tall walls, which limit visibility and access, restrict apparent crime opportunities. For example, burglarizing a house in the Gazargah neighborhood, where doors are secured and the alley has only one entrance, is difficult because movement is constantly observed by residents. Crime Opportunity Theory suggests that reducing "available targets" lowers the likelihood of crime, and this urban fabric plays such a role with its architectural constraints. However, the same compactness creates shadows that conceal hidden crime opportunities. Dimly lit alleys, such as those behind Haj Ghasem Bazaar, where streetlights are sparse or unlit, serve as shelters for petty crimes. Reports of bicycle thefts, stolen household items from backyards, and even drug transactions in abandoned houses in the Posht Bagh neighborhood indicate that darkness and complexity reduce "the risk of being seen," a key factor emphasized in Crime Opportunity Theory.

Abandoned and old houses scattered in certain parts of the traditional urban fabric, such as near the Six-Windcatcher Water Reservoir, have become "defensible voids"—spaces lacking surveillance that effectively serve as invitations for offenders. However, collective supervision moderates these risks. For instance, in high-traffic alleys near Jame Mosque, where residents and shopkeepers are always present, theft or misconduct is rare because human presence eliminates opportunities. Nonetheless, when this surveillance weakens—such as in remote alleys or during late-night hours—crime opportunities resurface. This duality indicates that the traditional fabric both restricts and, in its hidden corners, facilitates crime.

The modern urban fabric of Yazd presents a different scenario with its wide streets and open spaces. This openness, designed for modern mobility and daily life, enhances visibility and in some areas reduces crime opportunities. For instance, pickpocketing in broad daylight at Azadi Square is challenging due to natural surveillance (a CPTED principle) provided by lighting and the presence of people. However, this openness is also accompanied by spatial dispersion and fragmentation, where crime opportunities become more pronounced. Blind spots, such as open parking lots in Azadshahr or secluded corners of Haft Tir Park, are

settings that Crime Opportunity Theory predicts as crime-prone locations.

For example, car theft in poorly lit parking areas in Safaieh or pickpocketing in side alleys behind Farrokhi Street is linked to a lack of lighting and surveillance. These spaces, being out of residents' sight, reduce "the risk of being seen" and enable criminal thought to materialize. Apartment buildings, with large windows and vacant units—such as in Safaieh complexes—expose "potential targets." Reports of apartment burglaries indicate that offenders take advantage of identifying unoccupied units. Low-traffic streets and unsupervised parks, such as Pahlevan Yazdi Park at night, provide further opportunities. Reports indicate instances of street fights and drug use in secluded corners of these parks, facilitated by anonymity and the absence of human presence. Broken Windows Theory also applies here—broken benches or scattered trash in a park signal neglect and may trigger a sequence of unlawful behaviors. However, in areas where artificial surveillance, such as security cameras in Atlas Square, is present, crime opportunities decrease, demonstrating the impact of urban design on crime reduction.

Comparing these two urban fabrics reveals two sides of the crime opportunity spectrum. In the traditional fabric, opportunities are more restricted—density and collective surveillance in neighborhoods such as Fahadan reduce access and visibility. However, darkness and hidden corners in neglected alleys create opportunities for petty crimes such as theft or drug transactions. In the modern fabric, crime opportunities are more widespread—openness and fragmentation increase defenseless spaces, facilitating more complex crimes such as apartment burglaries or pickpocketing, although lighting and visibility sometimes act as deterrents.

Crime Opportunity Theory explains this distinction: in the traditional fabric, crime opportunities rely on "hidden spaces," whereas in the modern fabric, they emerge from open but unsupervised spaces. CPTED offers a solution—improving lighting in traditional alleys and implementing artificial surveillance in modern spaces could reduce these opportunities. Broken Windows Theory further warns that signs of disorder—such as an abandoned house in the traditional fabric or a neglected parking lot in the modern fabric—stimulate criminal thought.

This study reveals that in Yazd, crime opportunities are deeply embedded in the city's urban fabric. In the traditional fabric, a dark alley or an abandoned house—such as in Posht Bagh—can ignite criminal thought, but collective surveillance mitigates it. In the modern fabric, a deserted street or an unguarded park—such as Haft Tir Park—fosters criminal behavior unless design and surveillance intervene. These opportunities not only enable crime but also stimulate the mind, fostering criminal thought, an issue this study seeks to address through its crime prevention recommendations.

5.4. Case Study: Examples of Crimes in the Traditional and Modern Urban Fabrics of Yazd

To bridge theory with reality, this section examines real-life examples of crimes in Yazd to illustrate how urban fabric practically influences criminal behavior.

In the traditional fabric, petty thefts often occur in narrow, secluded alleys. Reports include bicycle thefts or stolen household items from backyards, typically taking place at night and out of neighbors' sight. These crimes are often simple and opportunistic, exploiting shadows or inadequate lighting. Another example involves local disputes, such as property conflicts in Fahadan, where narrow alleys and heightened neighborhood cohesion have sometimes escalated into physical altercations, demonstrating that strong community ties, rather than preventing conflict, can sometimes fuel aggression. Additionally, drug transactions in abandoned historic houses have been reported, with high walls and sealed doors turning these locations into hidden refuges for illicit activity.

In the modern fabric, crimes take on a different form. More organized offenses, such as apartment burglaries, are common. For instance, in Safaieh, burglars have exploited the lack of security guards and surveillance cameras in residential complexes to target vacant units—a crime facilitated by social detachment and spatial separation. Pickpocketing in busy streets, such as Jomhuri Boulevard, is also prevalent, with motorcyclists taking advantage of anonymity and the speed of movement to escape undetected. Car thefts from open, dimly lit parking lots, such as those near Azadi Square, are enabled by open designs and the absence of surveillance. Additionally, street fights among young individuals in large parks, such as the City Grand Park,

highlight how isolated areas and a lack of collective supervision contribute to public disturbances.

These case studies offer a window into real-life urban crime. In the traditional fabric, crimes are smaller in scale, local, and closely tied to architectural constraints, though neighborhood surveillance often suppresses them. In the modern fabric, crimes are more complex, widespread, and linked to social fragmentation and spatial opportunities, where the city unintentionally provides more leeway for offenders. This analysis bridges theory and practice, offering a foundation for crime prevention strategies.

6. Results and Data Analysis

This exploration has portrayed Yazd's dual identity as two actors on a shared stage—one deeply rooted in history, the other aspiring toward the future. The traditional fabric, with its narrow alleys and strong neighborhood ties, appears as a guardian restricting criminal thought. Collective surveillance and social cohesion act as invisible barriers, limiting crime opportunities. However, dark corners and abandoned spaces sometimes create openings for misconduct. In contrast, the modern fabric, with its openness and fragmentation, appears to be a fertile ground for criminal thought—anonymity and the absence of surveillance facilitate crime, though lighting and visibility occasionally serve as deterrents.

These findings suggest that the traditional fabric excels in crime prevention, albeit with vulnerabilities, while the modern fabric, despite its advancements, fosters crime opportunities. Urban design plays a dual role in this process—it can either suppress or create crime opportunities. Broken Windows Theory, Crime Opportunity Theory, and CPTED all confirm that strategic urban planning can transform the city into a crime-resistant environment. The results underscore that a well-designed city is not only a physical space but also a psychological force shaping human behavior.

7. Conclusion

This study, like a guiding light through the alleys and streets of Yazd, has unveiled the deep connection between urban fabric and criminal thought. The traditional fabric, with its narrow alleys, tall walls, and strong neighborhood cohesion, acts as a fortress against

crime; collective surveillance and a sense of belonging function as chains that restrain criminal tendencies. The data indicate that perceived security is higher in this fabric, and petty thefts mainly occur in blind spots and dimly lit areas rather than in the heart of active neighborhoods. However, shadows and abandoned houses sometimes weaken this shield, creating opportunities for crime. In contrast, the modern fabric, with wide streets, strong lighting in some areas, and social fragmentation, resembles fertile ground where criminal opportunities take root more easily. Lower perceived security is linked to anonymity and defenseless spaces. While lighting and visibility sometimes act as deterrents, blind spots significantly increase crime opportunities. These findings, analyzed through criminological theories such as Broken Windows Theory and Crime Opportunity Theory, demonstrate that a city is not just a physical space but also a psychological force that shapes human behavior. Yazd, in its duality, serves as a reflection of this reality.

Despite its depth, this study faced certain limitations. Restricted access to detailed crime data in each urban fabric occasionally limited the scope of analysis. Additionally, focusing exclusively on Yazd ties the findings to this specific city, and the results may vary in cities with different cultural and climatic conditions. A comparative study between Yazd and other Iranian cities such as Isfahan or Tehran could reveal how universally applicable these patterns are. This research is merely the beginning of a path, a seed that has been planted, which—through future studies—can grow into a tree whose shade and fruit contribute to safer cities.

From this study, several solutions emerge for the future of Yazd, solutions that are both grounded in the findings and aligned with Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles. In the traditional fabric, enhancing lighting is crucial for reducing crime opportunities in dimly lit alleys such as those behind Haj Ghasem Bazaar, where nighttime thefts have been reported. Installing solar-powered or LED streetlights that preserve the area's historical identity while eliminating dark hiding spots can be effective. For instance, adding lighting in Fahadan could enhance visibility and increase the "risk of being seen" for potential offenders. Additionally, restoring abandoned houses—such as those in Khorramshah, which have become hubs for illegal activities like drug

transactions—can transform them into public spaces such as libraries, handicraft workshops, or small museums. This initiative would revive collective ownership and diminish crime opportunities. Furthermore, preserving neighborhood cohesion while integrating modern elements is essential. Encouraging the continuation of community events, such as religious ceremonies in Hussainiyas, alongside the introduction of local markets and public gatherings, will strengthen social ties and reinforce natural surveillance in these neighborhoods.

In the modern fabric, where anonymity weakens surveillance, artificial monitoring should compensate for the absence of community oversight. Installing CCTV cameras in crime-prone areas, such as open parking lots along Modarres Boulevard or secluded corners of urban parks, can act as a deterrent. For instance, increasing the number of cameras in Safaieh would expand visibility and increase the "cost of crime." Moreover, designing community-oriented spaces is crucial. Creating small public squares with benches, proper lighting, and green areas in districts like Azadshahr, or converting an empty lot near Daneshjoo Boulevard into a neighborhood plaza, would restore a sense of belonging. These spaces, by attracting residents, would bridge social fragmentation and enhance human presence. Managing defensible spaces is another priority. Parking lots and dimly lit alleys—such as those around Atlas Square—should be equipped with lower walls, better lighting, or security personnel to increase safety. Additionally, promoting social programs, such as neighborhood festivals or community groups in apartment complexes—particularly in Safaieh residential buildings—can foster relationships among residents, reducing indifference and rebuilding community cohesion.

At a broader policy level, legal regulations should be introduced to mandate lighting improvements in traditional areas and surveillance measures in modern districts through collaboration between the municipality and law enforcement agencies to establish higher safety standards. Additionally, citizen education programs should be implemented, particularly in the modern fabric, to raise awareness about the role of natural surveillance and crime reporting in fostering a sense of responsibility among residents. These recommendations, by integrating urban design and community engagement, aim to transform Yazd into a

city that is not only historically rich and aesthetically appealing but also safe and socially connected.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all individuals helped us to do the project.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

References

- Brantingham, P. J., & Brantingham, P. L. (1991). *Environmental Criminology*. Sage Publications.
- Cozens, P. M. (2008). *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design*. In R. Wortley & L. Mazerolle (Eds.), *Environmental Criminology and Crime Analysis*.
- Felson, M., & Clarke, R. V. (1998). *Opportunity Makes the Thief: Practical Theory for Crime Prevention*. Police Research Series, Paper 98, Home Office, London.
- Karimi, A. (2023). Examining the impact of urban lighting on crime reduction in Iranian cities. *Journal of Human Settlement Planning Studies*, 17(2), 67-82.
- Mohammadi, J. (2020). Urban development and social changes in the desert cities of Iran: The case of Yazd. *Human Geography Research*, 52(4), 112-130.
- Rezai, M. (2019). Urban planning and security: The role of urban design in crime reduction in Iran. *Quarterly Journal of Urban Studies*, 10(2), 78-95.

- Sampson, R. J., & Groves, W. B. (1989). Community Structure and Crime: Testing Social-Disorganization Theory. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94(4), 774-802. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/229068>
- Sharifi, A. (2021). Analysis of the historical texture of Yazd from social and physical perspectives. *Iranian Journal of Architecture and Urbanism*, 15(1), 23-40.
- Taghvaei, M., & Kiani, A. (2017). Spatial analysis of crime in urban areas: A case study of Isfahan. *Journal of Geography and Development*, 45, 33-50.
- Wilson, J. Q., & Kelling, G. L. (1982). Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 249(3), 29-38.
- Yazdani, S. (2022). *A criminological study of urban neighborhoods in Yazd: A look at neighborhood security* [Yazd University, Faculty of Social Sciences].