Effect of Fear of Crime on Residential Neighbourhood Density in Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract - Fear of crime has become a pervasive feature of everyday urban life, particularly in rapidly urbanising cities of the Nigeria, where socio-spatial inequality and infrastructural deficits increase residents' perceptions of insecurity. Beyond actual crime incidence, fear of crime functions as an emotional condition that shapes mobility, social interaction, and urban well-being. This study examines the relationship between fear of crime and urban well-being across residential neighbourhood density areas in Ibadan, Nigeria, with particular attention to emotional responses and everyday coping practices. Drawing on a cross-sectional household survey of 1,342 residents across (169) respondents in low-density areas, (440) in medium-density and (733) in high-density neighbourhoods. The study employed descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, correlation analysis, and analysis of variance to explore spatial variations and relational dynamics. The findings revealed significant differences in fear of crime across residential neighbourhood density areas, with high-density areas exhibiting the highest levels of expressed fear, while medium-density neighbourhoods demonstrate heightened emotional insecurity associated with infrastructural decline and social transition. Across all neighbourhood types, fear of crime shows a strong inverse relationship with urban well-being, exerting a more pronounced influence than reported experiences of victimisation. Residents adapt through a range of everyday practices, including avoidance behaviour, reliance on collective surveillance, and home fortification, with patterns varying by neighbourhood tyes. The study concludes that fear of crime constitutes an emotional dimension of urban inequality that demands planning responses beyond conventional crime-control strategies. Integrating emotion-sensitive planning, community engagement, and context-specific urban design is essential for promoting safer and more inclusive cities in Nigeria and comparable urban centers.

Keywords: Fear of crime; Urban well-being; Emotion; Neighbourhood effects; Urban planning; Ibadan, Nigeria

I.   INTRODUCTION

Fear of crime has increasingly been recognised as a central dimension of urban life that shapes residents' well-being beyond measurable crime incidence. Contemporary urban research emphasises that fear is not merely a rational response to victimisation risk but an emotional condition rooted in anxiety, anticipation, and perceived vulnerability (Jackson, 2011; Gray et al., 2020). In African cities, where rapid urbanisation overlaps with socio-spatial inequality, infrastructural deficits, and weak governance, fear of crime often becomes embedded in everyday experience and exerts a profound influence on how residents engage with urban space (UN-Habitat, 2021).

In Nigerian cities, rising concerns about insecurity have generated substantial scholarly and policy attention. However, most studies remain focused on crime incidence, policing, or socio-economic correlates of victimisation, with comparatively limited emphasis on fear of crime as a subjective and emotional phenomenon (Adebayo, 2022; Ajayi & Owolabi, 2023). Empirical evidence from diverse urban settings demonstrates that fear of crime frequently has more severe consequences for mental health, social participation, and quality of life than direct experiences of crime itself (Haleem et al., 2021; WHO, 2022). Persistent fear restricts mobility, erodes trust, and undermines residents' sense of belonging, thereby reducing general urban well-being.

Ibadan, being one of Nigeria's largest metropolitan areas, offers an important setting for examining these dynamics. The city exhibits marked residential differentiation, with low-density planned neighbourhoods, medium-density that are transitional areas, and high-density inner-city and peri-urban settlements co-existing within the same metropolitan space. These neighbourhoods differ substantially in physical form, infrastructure provision, social organisation, and perceived security, creating uneven emotional geographies of fear of crime. Understanding how fear of crime varies across these residential neighbourhood areas and how it shapes everyday practices and well-being, is essential for developing effective and inclusive planning responses.

This paper examines fear of crime as an emotional mediator between neighbourhood and urban well-being in Ibadan, Nigeria. Drawing on household survey data were collected across low-, medium-, and high-density neighbourhoods, the study addresses three objectives: to analyse spatial variations in fear of crime, to assess the relationship between fear and urban well-being, and to examine residents' everyday coping practices in response to perceived insecurity. By foregrounding emotion and lived experience, the paper contributes to growing debates on emotional geographies, neighbourhood effects, and planning for urban safety in African cities.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Fear of Crime as an Emotional Construct
Fear of crime is widely conceptualised as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing affective, cognitive, and behavioural components. While early criminological studies emphasised cognitive assessments of victimisation risk, more recent scholarship highlights the affective dimension of fear, defined by feelings of anxiety, unease, and vulnerability that persist even in the absence of direct crime experience (Jackson, 2011; Lorenc et al., 2019). Emotional fear is shaped by personal history, neighbourhood reputation, media narratives, and environmental cues such as poor lighting, disorder, and neglect (Ceccato & Nalla, 2020).

Importantly, fear of crime is often disproportionate to actual crime rates, reflecting broader social anxieties and structural inequalities (Gray et al., 2020). In cities characterised by poverty, informality, and weak institutional trust, fear becomes normalised as part of everyday urban life, influencing residents' perceptions of safety and shaping their emotional relationship with space (Pain, 2019). Recognising fear as an emotional condition rather than a purely rational response is therefore essential for understanding its impacts on well-being.

Urban Well-Being and Neighbourhood Setting
Urban well-being is increasingly understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing material living conditions, physical and mental health, social relationships, and subjective life satisfaction (OECD, 2020). Safety and security are central to this framework, as persistent fear of crime underscores psychological well-being, discourages social interaction, and restricts access to urban opportunities (WHO, 2022). Neighbourhood areas plays a critical role in shaping these outcomes, as environmental quality, social cohesion, and access to services vary across space.

The paraphernalia of neigbourhood research demonstrates that residents of disadvantaged or poorly serviced areas often experience higher levels of fear of crime and lower well-being, regardless of individual socio-economic status (Sampson, 2012; Galster, 2019). On the other hand, neighbourhoods characterised by strong social ties and collective efficacy may mitigate fear and enhance residents' security, even in consonance of limited formal policing (Morenoff et al., 2021). These findings affirm the importance of analysing fear of crime within specific residential neighbourhood areas, rather than as an individual attribute.

Residential Density, Urban Form, and Fear
Residential density has long been debated in relation to crime and fear of crime, with simplistic assumptions often linking higher density to greater insecurity. Contemporary research, however, emphasises that density alone does not generate fear of crime; rather, it interacts with urban design, land-use patterns, and social organisation (Ceccato, 2019). Poor visibility, overcrowding, deteriorating infrastructure, and lack of active public spaces intensify fear of crime, while well-designed high-density areas with strong social networks may foster perceived safety.

Medium-density neighbourhoods, particularly in rapidly urbanising cities, often experience heightened emotional insecurity due to transitional dynamics such as land-use change, declining infrastructure, and weakening social cohesion (UN-Habitat, 2021). Low-density neighbourhoods, although physically insulated, may also experience fear driven by isolation, reliance on private security, and media-amplified perceptions of crime (Cozens & Love, 2017). These variations highlight the need for analysis of fear across neighbourhood density areas.

Everyday Practices and Coping Behaviours
Fear of crime manifests most clearly in residents' everyday practices and behavioural adaptations. Studies shows that fear influences how people move through the city, the times at which they travel, and the spaces they choose to avoid (Pain & Smith, 2008; Day et al., 2021). Common coping strategies include

route avoidance, reduced night-time mobility, home fortification, and withdrawal from public life. While such practices may reduce perceived risk, they often reduce social interaction and negatively affect physical and mental well-being.

These coping practices are shaped by neighbourhood situation and available resources. In some residential neighbourhood areas, collective strategies such as informal surveillance and community networks provide emotional reassurance, while in others, fear of crime leads to privatisation of space and social isolation (Ceccato & Nalla, 2020). Understanding these everyday responses is critical for linking fear of crime to residents' well-being

Planning Responses to Fear of Crime
Urban planning responses to crime have traditionally focused on environmental design approaches, particularly Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). While CPTED emphasises visibility, access control, and territoriality, critics argue that it often neglects the emotional and social dimensions of fear of crime (Cozens & Love, 2017). Recent scholarship advocates for emotion-sensitive planning that recognises fear of crime as a lived experience shaped by social relations, memory, and perception (Pain, 2019).

In Nigeria cities, planning responses are further complicated by informality, limited resources, and fragmented governance structures (UN-Habitat, 2020). Addressing fear of crime therefore requires integrated strategies that combine physical design improvements with community engagement and institutional reform.

Study Area and Context: Ibadan, Nigeria
Ibadan is a major metropolitan centre in southwestern Nigeria, with a population exceeding three million residents. Its urban structure reflects successive phases of growth, resulting in a heterogeneous spatial pattern characterised by distinct residential density areas. Low-density neighbourhoods are typically planned and characterised by larger plots, lower population density, and greater reliance on private security. Medium-density areas represent transitional areas with mixed land use, moderate infrastructure provision, and diverse socio-economic groups. High-density neighbourhoods, often comprising inner-city and peri-urban settlements, are marked by overcrowding, informal development, and limited access to basic services.

These spatial differences have important implications for fear of crime and well-being. While crime incidents occur across all neighbourhood types, residents' perceptions of safety and emotional responses to insecurity vary significantly, shaped by environmental quality, social organisation, and access to security resources.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design to examine fear of crime and urban well-being across residential density areas in Ibadan. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to adult residents in selected neighbourhoods. The study forms part of a broader doctoral research project on fear of crime and residents' well-being in Ibadan.

A total of 1,342 respondents participated in the survey, comprising 169 respondents from low-density residential neighbourhood areas, 440 from medium-density and 733 respondents from high-density neighbourhood areas. This distribution reflects the demographic structure of the city and ensures adequate representation accross all the residential density areas. The questionnaire captured socio-demographic characteristics, perceptions of neighbourhood safety, and emotional indicators of fear of crime, well-being measures, and everyday coping practices.

Fear of crime was operationalised using Likert-scale items measuring anxiety, vulnerability, and perceived insecurity in public and private spaces, consistent with established fear-of-crime measurement approaches (Jackson, 2011; Gray et al., 2020). Urban well-being was assessed through indicators relating to psychological comfort, social interaction, and satisfaction with neighbourhood conditions. Data were analysed with descriptive statistics.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis demonstrates that the effects of fear of crime are unevenly distributed across residential neighbourhood density areas, with marked variations in how insecurity reshapes social relations, spatial

behaviour, and neighbourhood outcomes. One of the most prominent result is the perception and experience of over-policing, which differs significantly by neighbourhood type. Survey results revealed that experiences of excessive or intrusive policing are most pronounced in medium-density neighbourhoods (44.7%) and high-density neighbourhoods (37.0%), compared to relatively low levels in low-density areas (18.4%). Overall, more than two-thirds of respondents reported some form of over-policing. This pattern suggests that neighbourhoods characterised by higher population density and lower socio-economic status are more frequently subjected to intensified law enforcement presence.

In medium- and high-density neighbourhoods, residents associate over-policing with exaggerated portrayals of crime in congested and less affluent areas. Such portrayals often translate into heightened surveillance, frequent patrols, and disproportionate enforcement practices, which collectively contribute to strained relationships between residents and law enforcement agencies. Rather than enhancing safety, these practices tend to generate tension, anxiety, and mistrust, particularly among young people and socially marginalised groups who perceive themselves as targets of suspicion. In contrast, low-density neighbourhoods typically occupied by wealthier and politically connected residents experience far less visible policing. Safety in these areas is largely managed through private security arrangements and stronger institutional leverage, reinforcing spatial inequalities in how public security is delivered. These findings underscore the need to shift from reactive, enforcement-heavy policing towards inclusive, community-oriented and preventive approaches.

Fear of crime also exerts a strong influence on neighbourhood property values, with effects most evident in medium- and high-density areas. Nearly half of respondents in medium-density neighbourhoods (45.8%) and over one-third in high-density neighbourhoods (35.0%) reported that fear of crime has contributed to declining property values, compared to less than one-fifth (19.2%) in low-density neighbourhoods. In total, close to two-thirds of respondents indicated that insecurity negatively affects real estate values. This disparity reflects the sensitivity of property markets to perceptions of safety. In neighbourhoods where fear is more visible

manifested through defensive architecture, restricted mobility, and social withdrawal prospective buyers and investors often perceive heightened risk, resulting in reduced demand and declining values.

Medium-density neighbourhoods appear particularly vulnerable due to regulatory uncertainty, mixed land-use patterns, and inconsistent enforcement of development controls, all of which intensify perceptions of disorder and insecurity. High-density neighbourhoods, often characterised by informal development and overcrowding, experience additional stigmatisation that further suppresses property values. These processes encourage neglect of housing maintenance and, in some cases, residential out-migration, thereby reinforcing a cycle of physical deterioration and neighbourhood decline. On the contrary, low-density neighbourhoods such as Bodija, Idi-Ishin, Iyaganku, and Jericho benefit from regulated development, better infrastructure, and higher socio-economic status, which collectively buffer against fear-induced depreciation. The presence of gated estates, active residents' associations, and private security further sustains property values in these areas.

Stigma emerges as another major consequence of fear of crime, particularly in high-density neighbourhoods where 64.1% of respondents reported experiencing stigmatisation, compared to 21.3% in medium-density and 14.6% in low-density areas. In all, more than two-fifths of respondents acknowledged being affected by neighbourhood stigma. These figures reflect how societal narratives disproportionately label poorer and more congested neighbourhoods as unsafe or crime-prone. High-density communities such as Oje, Eleta, Oranyan, and Beere are frequently highlighted in media reporting and public discourse as sites of crime, poverty, and unemployment. This persistent association shapes both external perceptions and residents' self-identities.

Stigmatisation has far-reaching consequences, including reduced investment, constrained social mobility, and exclusion from development initiatives. Internally, residents may internalise negative labels, leading to diminished neighbourhood pride, weakened community cohesion, and reduced participation in collective action. In some cases, stigma extends beyond neighbourhood boundaries, with residents particularly young people experiencing discrimination in employment and

social opportunities based on their place of residence. In contrast, medium- and low-density neighbourhoods rarely attract the same level of negative social labelling, even when crime incidents occur. This asymmetry reflects the class-based construction of fear and criminality. Addressing stigma in Ibadan therefore requires not only physical interventions but also deliberate efforts to rebalance media narratives, promote equitable investment, and highlight the resilience and development potential of marginalised communities.

Added to these is the role of media representation. Negative media reporting was identified as a major influence on fear of crime across all neighbourhood types, though its effects are strongest in high-density neighbourhoods (40.0%), followed by medium-density (35.0%) and low-density areas (25.0%). 60.0% of respondents revealed that media narratives contributed to heightened fear of crime. High-density neighbourhoods are disproportionately featured in crime-related media stories, reinforcing stereotypes of danger and disorder. Such portrayals amplify fear of crime both among residents and outsiders, leading to social avoidance and economic isolation. Medium-density neighbourhoods also attract negative attention, particularly where informal activities are visible, while low-density neighbourhoods despite experiencing crimes such as burglary rarely receive comparable coverage. This imbalance distorts public perception and policy focus, making it difficult to address urban safety holistically. Challenging these dynamics requires ethical journalism, community-based storytelling, and greater visibility for resident-led narratives.

Persistent fear of crime also weakens neighbourhood cohesion, though the mechanisms vary across residential contexts. In low-density neighbourhoods, 80.5% of respondents reported that reliance on private space and security reduces opportunities for collective engagement. In high-density neighbourhoods, overcrowding and mutual mistrust undermine collective efficacy for 78.0% of respondents. Medium-density neighbourhoods appear comparatively more resilient, with 42.5% reporting reduced cohesion, possibly reflecting a balance between social familiarity and spatial diversity that still allows for some degree of cooperation despite insecurity.

Fear of crime further influences residential mobility and housing abandonment. The tendency to relocate is strongest in low-density neighbourhoods (88.2%), followed by medium-density (57.0%) and high-density areas (45.0%). In low-density areas, higher-income residents often respond to perceived insecurity by moving elsewhere, leaving behind vacant houses guarded by private security. In medium-density neighbourhoods, abandonment contributes to gradual neighbourhood decline, while in high-density areas, persistent housing demand limits large-scale abandonment despite widespread fear. Nonetheless, vacant and neglected properties across all neighbourhoods contribute to physical decay and create conditions that may attract further fear of crime.

The use of public and recreational spaces is also significantly curtailed by fear of crime, particularly in medium-density (81.1%) and high-density neighbourhoods (74.1%), where residents rely more heavily on shared facilities. Avoidance of these spaces leads to underutilisation, neglect, and reduced public investment, thereby increasing vulnerability to crime and reinforcing fear. Low-density neighbourhoods experience a lesser impact (42.0%), which might be due to greater access to private amenities. Neighbourhood pride declines markedly where fear and negative imagery dominate. A large proportion of respondents across all neighbourhoods reported reduced pride 92.9% in low-density, 89.3% in medium-density, and 79.8% in high-density areas.

These are often linked to visible signs of disorder such as vandalism and poor maintenance. While high-density neighbourhoods sometimes retain strong identity within smaller social units. Generally, reduced pride discourages community stewardship and heightens susceptibility to escalating fear of crime.

Fear of crime also encourages defensive urban forms. Support for gated neighbourhoods is strongest in medium-density areas (85.5%), followed by low-density neighbourhoods (66.9%), where gating reflects a desire for exclusivity. High-density neighbourhoods show more moderate support (49.1%), constrained by physical layout and feasibility. Similarly, the widespread adoption of defensive architectural features bars, fences, high walls, and surveillance systems reflects attempts to manage insecurity. Although intended to enhance safety, such features often signal danger and inadvertently reinforce perceptions of an unsafe

environment. Institutional trust is further eroded by fear of crime, particularly in low-density (74.0%) and high-density neighbourhoods (61.7%), undermining residents' willingness to cooperate with public safety initiatives. Reduced confidence in governance weakens collective action and complicates the implementation of crime prevention strategies.

In the long run, the most profound impact of fear of crime is on residents' sense of safety and psychological well-being. A majority of respondents in high-density neighbourhoods (92.1%) and substantial proportions in low-density (63.9%) and medium-density areas (61.1%) reported feeling unsafe within their neighbourhoods. This diminished sense of safety restricts public life, heightens isolation, and negatively affects mental health. Fear-driven abandonment of public spaces, infrastructure neglect, and declining environmental quality further compounded these challenges, creating self-reinforcing cycles of fear of crime and urban decline (see table 1.1).

Table 1.1 The effect of fear of crime on Residential neighbourhoods.

Variable	Low Density F	Low Density %	Medium Density F	Medium Density %	High Density F	High Density %	Total F	Total %
Over Policing	152	89.9	370	84.1	306	41.7	828	70.0
Decline in Property Value	121	71.6	288	65.5	220	30.0	629	64.0
Increased Stigma	152	89.9	221	50.2	666	90.9	1039	40.7
Reduced Community Cohesion	136	80.5	187	42.5	572	78.0	895	66.7
Increased Abandonment of Homes	149	88.2	251	57.0	330	45.0	730	54.4
Reduced Access to Community Resources	71	42.0	357	81.1	543	74.1	971	72.4
Reduced Neighbourhood Pride	157	92.9	393	89.3	585	79.8	1135	84.6
Promotion of Gated Neighbourhoods	113	66.9	376	85.5	360	49.1	849	63.3
Reduced Trust in Community Institutions	125	74.0	121	27.5	452	61.7	698	52.0
Increased Use of Neighbourhood Defensive Architecture	157	92.9	148	33.6	674	92.0	979	73.0
Reduced Sense of Community Safety	108	63.9	269	61.1	675	92.1	1052	78.4
Increased Abandonment of Community Space	109	64.5	370	84.1	389	53.1	868	64.7
Increase in Infrastructure Decline	111	65.7	274	62.3	645	88.0	1030	76.8

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Investigation further revealed significant spatial variation in fear of crime and urban well-being across Ibadan's neighbourhoods. High-density areas recorded the highest levels of expressed fear, particularly regarding night-time movement and use of public spaces. Medium-density neighbourhoods exhibited pronounced emotional insecurity, reflecting uncertainty associated with infrastructural decline and changing social composition. Low-density neighbourhoods reported comparatively

lower fear levels but expressed concerns related to isolation and dependence on private security.

Statistical analysis revealed a significant inverse relationship between fear of crime and residents' well-being across all neighbourhood types. Higher levels of emotional fear of crime were associated with reduced psychological comfort, lower neighbourhood satisfaction, and reduced social interaction. However, fear of crime exerted a stronger influence on well-being than reported experiences of victimization. This corroborates findings from previous studies by (Lorenc et al., 2019; Haleem et al., 2021). Everyday coping practices varied across all the residential neighbourhood density. Residents in high-density areas relied heavily on collective surveillance and informal social networks, while those in medium-density neighbourhoods adopted avoidance strategies such as route changes and restricted movement. In low-density areas, fear of crime management centred on physical security measures and controlled access.

Further findings shows that fear of crime as an emotional and spatially differentiated phenomenon that significantly shapes well-being in Ibadan. While high-density neighbourhoods experience elevated fear of crime levels, strong social ties in some areas provide partial emotional buffering. Medium-density neighbourhoods emerge as particularly vulnerable due to transitional dynamics that undermine both physical infrastructure and social cohesion. Low-density neighbourhoods revealed that affluence and planning do not eradicate fear of crime but instead reshape its emotional expression.

These results contribute to urban scholarship by demonstrating that fear of crime in Nigerian cities cannot be understood solely through crime statistics or physical form. Emotional responses, shaped by neighbourhood context and everyday experience, play a central role in determining well-being outcomes. The study extends emotional geography perspectives into the Nigerian urban context and highlights the need for planning frameworks that address both material and emotional dimensions of safety.

V. PLANNING AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings call for a shift from crime-centric planning approaches toward emotion-sensitive urban design and governance. Planning interventions should prioritise visibility, mixed land use, and active public spaces while strengthening community-based safety initiatives. Medium-density neighbourhoods require targeted infrastructural upgrades and social programmes to reduce uncertainty and emotional insecurity. High-density areas would benefit from investments in public space quality and support for existing social networks, while low-density neighbourhoods require strategies that balance physical security with social integration.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study validates that fear of crime operates as an emotional condition that significantly influences residents' well-being in Ibadan, Nigeria. Neighbourhood context shapes both the intensity of fear of crime and residents' coping practices, with important implications for planning and policy. By foregrounding emotion and everyday experience, the paper advances understanding of urban insecurity in Nigerian cities and underscores the need for planning approaches that address not only fear of crime but also the emotional dimensions of safety and well-being.

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