

Lilliputian Neglected Happenings Call For Snafu: “Theory of Broken Windows”

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Abstract

This article named “Lilliputian neglected happenings call for snafu” is a work focusing on the small things that are usually neglected and avoided during policing which further leads to hampering of peace and harmony in the neglected society or community thus giving a chance to the delinquents and offenders to foul up and create a chaotic situation. This work is inspired from the “Theory of Broken Windows” which was introduced by James Q Wilson and George L. Kelling in March 1982 in an article named “Broken Windows: The Police & neighborhood safety” in The Atlantic, retrieved 2007-09-03. This article first starts explaining the definition and origin of theory in general then how it reached its targeted audience and got popularized. The influencing power of the theory has been elaborately discussed, its theoretical tendency to revamp the policing methods have been stated and then the practical adoption of the theory by the New York police department and the consequences of the same have been enunciated. Finally the observation after through research works whether the theory is practically persistent or not has been deduced along with the concluding remarks.

Key words: *crime rate, social disorder, petty offences, environmental attitude, offenders*

Introduction

According to William J. Bratton, the former Police Chief of Los Angeles and New York City said that “If you take care of the little things, then you can prevent a lot of the big things.” In March 1982 James Q Wilson and George L. Kelling came up with the “Broken Windows Theory” in their article titled “Broken Windows” in the Atlantic Monthly.^[1] This theory dealt with the secret of persistent good management and maintenance through immediate replacement of the broken windows or other signs of disorder in order to prevent the criminals from assuming those signs as signs of weak social control, thus preventing omnishambles or a chaotic situation.

The theory was majorly targeted towards the policing trends and it tried to incorporate the methods

of immediate peeling of the onion, disposal hydra-headed instruments and other problems that usually goes unattended in a given environment and affects the peoples attitude towards the environment and leads to further aggravation of the matter but as a corollary to this theory if the problems are well tended as soon as they arise and swiped out from the roots using successful policing strategies thus restoring order in the society and reducing crime in our communities because April showers bring the May flowers .

However it is majorly a criminological theory that states the eye catchy signs of civil disorderliness, anti-social behavior or other criminal activities that gives scope to further create disorders including serious crimes.

Reaching the Targeted Audience and Getting Popularised:

Being one of the most cited articles the Broken Windows theory creates records in the history of Criminology. Since huge number of cities throughout the world has used Wilson and Kellings ideas under the

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broken windows theory of policing as motivation for zero balance therefore it is also referred to as the Bible of policing wherein even the pettiest crimes are severely punished for.^[2]

Influencing Power of the Theory:

The broken windows theory has influenced the creation of Ontario's Safe Streets Act^[3] generated legal response to panhandlers, noisy neighbors and other forms of anti social behavior. Even By laws have been enacted through this act in order to curb the social and physical disorders. This theory of broken windows and its influence on policy and policing needs to be reformed due to the contentious approach that it has created and incorporated within marginalized neighborhoods. If it tries to strictly focus on solving the problems by engaging directly in dialogue with the communities then this broken windows theory would prove to be more effective on policies and policing.

Adoption of the Theory by The New York Police Department:

Closely following the Wilson and Kellings 1982 model^[4] the agencies first applied the broken windows theory of policing in several ways. However the most prominent way of adoption of this theory occurred in the New York City as an approach to crime and disorder. New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in 1990s enacted a policy whereby small crimes were targeted aggressively by the police and this message was channelized properly due to which a strong social signal was spread that "Crime isn't acceptable", thus, resulting in a significant fall of crime across the city.

Measuring The Broken Windows Treatment:

The best indicator of broken windows policing has been misdemeanor arrests since the data's are readily available and along with it the officers must also decide whether an arrest is appropriate or not. Therefore whether the New York Police Department was able to adopt this model successfully or not still remains open for discussion but it is very clear that its intervention is complex and evaluation would prove to be difficult. There has been much discussions on the impact of the adopted policing theory and the tactics on reducing crime and disorder. It has been stated by Eck & Maguire in 2000^[5] that the broken windows policing alone did not bring down the crime rates but it's also likely that police played some role.

Concequences of Applying The Theory:

Throughout the 1990s the broken window theory had an enormous impact on Policing and remained till the 21st century. It took a leap when the New York City applied the theory under the direction of William Bratton, police commissioner who believed in the theory and was convinced that the aggressive social order maintenance practices in the New York City Police Department were responsible for the drastic fall in the crime rates. William Bratton also translated the theory into practice as the Chief of New York City Police from 1990 -1992. Officers were assigned to catch hold of the social order breakers in squads wearing plainclothes without uniform which proved to decrease all kinds of crimes drastically.

Observational Deduction Whether the Theory is Persistent or Not? :

It is believed by most of the researchers on the broken windows theory that this theory has always worked better as an idea than as a description of the real world or when applied or adopted practically. The major problem in the theory is the inclusion of the perception that "disorders have more to do with the racial composition of a neighborhood than with the number of broken windows". Therefore we can deduce that it was persistent for a specific period only when it took a leap because of its practical adoption in New York City but when researches were made on the theory's practicability it was proved that it individually wasn't responsible for lowering the crime rates but along with it many factors worked simultaneously.

Indian Perspective:

Since the rate of petty offences is in diminishing order in India and the heinous crimes are increasing day by day so this theory won't be considered for practical application in India. Only when the situation demands for times when social disorder is at its peak and affecting the crime rate accordingly, necessary steps may be taken in order to apply the same theory if the rules, regulations and laws permit to do so. However the present situation demands stringent laws relating to heinous crimes in India and not the petty ones.

Conclusion

In brief the validity of the above theory is yet to be known, therefore it would be safe on my part to conclude that the broken windows theory even if valid does not state the explanation of all the components

that it involves. Further it is to be noted that it requires companion theories to explain the type of crimes and criminals that it would deal with. Unless more cities tend to adopt and experiment on the theory, the lacunas as well as the practicability cannot be precisely stated.

Ethical Clearance: Not required, as the research article is based on the relation between environmental attitude and petty offenders behavior. The research is doctrinally undertaken.

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