

# The broken windows theory

Law



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Broken Windows The “ Broken Windows” theory proposes that more serious crimes will come from minor crimes if they are not addressed in the first stages of infractions. In other words, if a window is broken in a building and no one does anything about it, then there will be more broken windows and, consequently, the building will lose all its glassed-in windows (Shelden 2003).

2. The “ Broken Windows” theory can be directly applied to those strategic implementations where police maintain a presence in any particular neighborhood, such as in a community which has a store-front operation (Shelden 2003; Hunter & Barker 2011). Not only are there police who have a regular beat in a community but they also have a rented space by which community members may come in to meet with the police and address their concerns about any criminal acts going on in their neighborhood.

3. The theory is still significant to community-oriented policing in that wherever police have a presence, this will most likely deter crime from happening (Van Zile 2011). It does not mean that more arrests will be made but that offenders will be cautioned first for minor offenses and if those offenses still take place, then offenders will be arrested. After all, they had been initially warned and this is an example of letting offenders know that police know who they are and that they are being watched (Shelden 2003).

4. In Sir Robert Peel’s Principles of Law Enforcement (1829), the first principle is a very strong argument for the “ Broken Windows” theory in that the role and mission of the police is to prevent crime and disorder within a neighborhood as opposed to the military version which represses crime and disorder through force and severe legal punishment (Hunter & Barker 2011).

The mere presence of the police may deter crime from happening in the first

place. Police presence is a deterrent to crime (Shelden 2003).

5. The most important law enforcement policies derived from the “ Broken Windows” theory is that crime can be deterred through a police presence, although, in reality, this relates more to petty crimes such as graffiti on building walls, window breaking, and other less violent or serious crimes (Shelden 2003). It does not address murders and other violent crimes because it is a different set of circumstances. However, if the police have a good relationship in the community where one of these more violent crimes does occur, the police are more apt to gather information from the neighborhood as to who might have seen what at any particular time (Hunter & Barker 2011). This could lead more quickly to finding a suspect and being able to charge the person with the crime.

6. The “ Broken Window” theory has proposed that a larger police presence will deter criminal activity although it is open to debate as to what specific crimes these might be. In general, less petty crime will occur with a police presence but it does not change the numbers on violent crime which generally will take place inside buildings, out of sight from others (Van Zile 2011). In cases of traffic offenses, people are less likely to speed when they see that there are more patrol cars monitoring traffic, particularly at intersections where people might run red lights. In some respects, the police have been given quotas to fulfill in writing up tickets for traffic offenses and this can cause problems with the public when they see too many people being pulled over by patrol cars (Van Zile 2011). This instills a sense of fear and mistrust of the police if people feel that policing activities are more about revenue than actually preventing or controlling crime.

#### Resources

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