

Fixing Broken Windows Theory

Kelling, G. & Coles, C. (1996) *Fixing Broken Windows*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

A study by Zimbardo (1973) suggested that vandalism left unchecked lead to more serious types of crime such as minor theft. In the mid 1970's, in the state of New Jersey, funding was provided for a project put police foot patrols back on the street. Five years after the project, an evaluation was published by the Police Foundation which concluded that crime rates had not been reduced. In an article in the Atlantic magazine, James Wilson and George Kelling (1982) suggested that the foot patrols had been successful in spite of this because they had reduced fear of crime and had increased maintenance of order in public areas. They suggested that although people feared "a sudden, violet attack by a stranger" (Ibid., p. 29), they also had fear "from a sense that the street is disorderly, a source of distasteful, worrisome encounters" (Ibid., p.31). They supported Zimbardo's work by suggesting that, over time, crime and disorder are linked by a developmental sequence, starting with the most simple levels of disorder, both physical and social, and leading to theft and, on occasion, violence. Therefore, by maintaining order in public areas there will be less escalation to other, more serious types of crime. This developmental sequence between disorder to more serious types of crime was established by Skogan (1990). He found that, with those surveyed, there was agreement about what constituted disorder and how much disorder was present locally. He also found that disorder was statistically linked with crime, more than other characteristics such as poverty and instability in the housing market.

In *Fixing Broken Windows* by George Kelling and Catherine Coles (1996), a number of successful projects were outlined. Specifically, the New York City subway was one of the first projects where order maintenance was employed. Early on, graffiti was minimized by swift and certain removal. The epidemic of homeless people living in the subway was addressed by integrated problem solving between involved agencies including the transit authority, the police, the mayor's office, as well as community groups, civil libertarians and advocates for the homeless. Agreement was reached between these diverse groups on actions that could be taken that would improve the situation. This was not without extensive legal struggles, but eventually, order was established in the subway system. More serious types of crime also fell substantially. The steps of this problem solving technique are summarized;

Step 1: Problem identification

Step 2: Identify possible programmatic changes

Step 3: Examine the viability and impacts of such programmatic changes

Step 4: Ensure all involved agencies or groups buy into the goals and plans for change

Step 5: Review existing regulations and programs against proposed changes

Step 6: Ensure legal, moral and political impacts are envisaged; prepare to win in court

Step 7: Establish an accurate feedback mechanism.

Safety Audits

A safety audit is where a group of people, mostly neighbors, will walk an area of their neighbourhood, daytime and nighttime and identifies places where they feel fearful or poor maintenance areas. This audit process promotes community involvement and caring which is an important first step for crime reduction in a community. They identify visual nuisance areas which can benefit from improvements. For example, a graffiti wall identified in the audit as a visual concern to the community can lead to a community mural. This gives the community a focus for resources allocation and sense of achievement with minimal expense. However, the audit often identifies fear places without taking into consideration actual risk locations. Trimming bushes and increasing lighting in fear places rarely has impact on actual crime.