THE THEORY OF BROKEN WINDOWS: THE INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENT ON THE CRIME RATE

INTRODUCTION:

The need for reform in society should start from an individual. The reform should be on reformative justice in order to bring all around peace in the society. Broken window theory is a metaphorical theory popularly used in the field of criminology and psychology, which states that petty disorder in neighbourhood will lead to the occurrence of serious crimes. Small and petty crimes must not be ignored and neglected as it would pave a way to the heinous crimes. People should confront minor problems in the neighbour on time in the society to fulfill their duties and responsibilities by eradicating heinous crimes of such nature. In an urban environment, few visible signs of crimes should be taken as a huge concern because these types of anti-social behavior may encourage further serious crimes.

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF THE THEORY:

In the 1800s, research started focusing on the different rates of crimes and in the year 1982, two academicians, James Q Wilson and George Kelling proposed the theory of broken window in which they used the window as a metaphor for a crime. It said that "considering a building with a few broken windows. If the windows are not repaired, the tendency is for vandals to break a few more windows. Eventually, they may break in to the building." Their views focused on stopping the crimes at the very first instance so that it didn't turn into heinous crimes.[1]

Before the development of this theory, everyone was major concerned with the serious crimes such as murder, robbery, rape etc but no one was having view that these serious crimes are a result of small chain crimes which ultimately resulted in to heinous crimes. After the introduction of this theory, the focus was shift to the minor crimes which should be taken care as a huge concern and must be stopped on time to block the chain of such small crimes so that these would not result in heinous crimes.

---

[1] https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/basics/broken-windows-theory

Disorder:

According to this theory, there are several stages of a crime, the one is disorder which believed that disorder is nothing but small visible signs of a crime and the police have to stop those signs to stop crime rate. Generally disorders are of two types: social and civil disorders. In simple term, disorder means anything which is not in order, not in a general state. For instance, there is a bad condition of roads nearby one's house which may lead to road accidents or there is a manhole open in between the roads or any person living in one's nearby society is behaving disorderly that is his actions are suspicious.

 Self-awareness:

One of the basic concepts of this theory is the self awareness. One must always be aware about the activities of his surroundings. If any disorder is occurring in the neighbourhood, then one must be aware and report to the nearby police station and if possible must take actions against in the best interest because sometimes it is not even possible for an officer to available at every place than at that time one can work as the eyes of the law in simple words one play one of the most important roles in either in decreasing the crime or increasing the crime.

Zero tolerance:

Zero tolerance or the maintain policy, it is one of the tools that is used to control social disorder in the neighbourhood. They say these policies imposed a rigid standard on the behavior of people from diverse cultures. It is believed that the small or minor crimes in surrounding transformed into the heinous crimes if not controlled on time therefore, the police should give lenient punishment to minor offenders. The goal is to prevent them from committing the offense in the future.

BROKEN WINDOWS PUT TO TEST:

The most notable application of the Broken Windows Theory was in New York under the supervision of Police Commissioner William Bratton. He believed that the stringent order maintenance practices were responsible for the substantial decrease in crime rates within the city during the 1990s. The practice adopted by the police which included the officers in plainclothes to arrest turnstile jumpers. As an initiative to crack down panhandling, disorderly behavior, public drinking, street prostitution and unsolicited windshield washing or other such attempts to

obtain cash from drivers stopped in traffic by the police officers which states that the as arrests for petty offences increased, there was a sudden decrease in subway criminal activities.[2]

There was also an age old practice adopted by social psychologist Philip G. Zimbardo in 1969 , he published research that became basis for the controversial broken window theory of policing which emerged by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kenning. They used this research as sole empirical evidence for their arguing that if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken.

In order to practice the theory, Zimbardo parked two cars, one in a neighbourhood area with high crime rate and other in a locality with a low crime rate, comprising of middle class different from former who are poor. The Car parked in poor neighbourhood was vandalised within an hour and observed that the most of the vandals were smartly dressed, were whites and didn't have criminal background. The situation of car parked in the middle class area is a little more appealing. After remaining there for a week, Zimbardo smashed the car using a sledgehammer. Thereafter, the occupants joined and after a couple of hours, the car was upside down and absolutely destroyed. It was noted again that the vandals were whites. It can be interpreted that vandalising abandoned property is a fun-filled activity and done by those who are not expected by virtue of them being law abiding. Hence, it is safely concluded that in the context, vandalism can occur anywhere and is indifferent to communal barriers.[3]

BROKEN WINDOW THEORY IN INDIA:

Till now, there is no such thing called broken window theory in India. India hasn't implemented this theory. One of the most populated country in the world and also the highly affected by the crimes, this theory needs to be implemented. The social disorder in India can be easily prevented by this theory. Major crimes can be controlled and in some cases stopped by taking control over the minor crimes which are easily visible within the locality nearby. The author is of opinion that this theory must be implemented in India and people also need to understand the gravity of the situation. As there is a common practice on the roads of India that if there is no any police officer at the signal then the people jump the signal without looking into the serious repercussions and it would lead to rash accident. A visible crackdown on these small offences not necessarily with

---

[2] https://www.britannica.com/topic/broken-windows-theory
[3]   https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/12/27/how-year-old-study-was-misconstrued-create-destructive-broken-windows-policing/

harsh punishment but something that has a small stigma will show that they mean business. Social awareness among the people should be spread to control the crime rate.[4]

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THEORY:

Despite being popular among policymakers, broken window theory has its fair share of critics. One of the criticism is that there is little empirical evidence that disorder when left unchallenged, causes crime. To validate the theory, it must be proved that disorder causes fear in the minds of people and that fear causes a breakdown of social controls and further resulted into crime. Finally crime must be shown to increase levels of disorder.[5]

Criminal Justice scholar Ralph Taylor, after extensive research concluded that it was difficult to find a clear and conclusive link between prevalence of disorder and occurrence of crime. Consequently, due to lack of evidence, broken windows has widely raised doubts.

This theory always considers the poor and homeless as disorderly people. They judge people by their clothes and way of living. Socio economic condition is taken as the only reason for the cause of the crime. The mentality of people cannot be changed. The theory discriminates against the minority communities in the society, there is an assumption that minority community people commits crime. This is an old aged presumption as there were many differences among white and black people. The zero-tolerance policy will increase the rate of people in jail and they will be tagged as criminals in society even though they have committed petty offences.

The whole theory depends upon the presumption don't know that what is going to be in the future that is not the permanent solution for decreasing the crime, not every person who may be some other particular reasons causing disorder in neighbourhood become the criminal.

CONCLUSION:

The Broken windows theory is the best tool to control crime rates because it solves the issue at the very initial stage itself and it also draws a connection between disorder and crime and attempts to maintain order. A deviation in the beahviour of the people is noticed at the outset and corrected immediately so as it doesn't converted in to any criminal activities. The zero tolerance policy pressurizes people to behave in a well manner. Although having different pros and cons

---

[4] http://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-3138-broken-window-theory.html
[5] https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-other-side-of-broken-windows

but this theory would be highly effective in a country like India to reduce crime rates. The application of this theory will be beneficial in maintaining law and order. There must be communal involvement in society to implement this theory successfully.