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# The Disadvantages Of The Broken Windows Theory In The United States

In the United States we have heard and seen crime happening right in our neighborhood and most minorities do not think of how our neighborhoods can affect our safety. Our neighborhoods can affect our safety if minor things like a broken street light isn't fixed or how about having more than five abandoned building with graffiti that no one seems to want to fix to sell and it sets fear and it gives outsiders of those neighborhoods an invitation to create crime in that area. All these examples are based on the broken windows theory. Two social scientists by the name of James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling introduced us to Broken Windows Theory in 1982 and popularized by the 1990's by the New York Police Commissioner William Bratton and Mayor Rudy Giuliani. I will provide a few pointers on the disadvantages of the broken windows theory.

Broken windows theory is defined as a concept that each problem that goes unattended in a given environment affects people's attitude toward that environment and leads to more problems in the future. Some of the minor crimes are loitering, public urination, aggressive panhandling, low level drug dealing, prostitution, and graffiti writing. One of the few disadvantages of broken windows theory is that while the minor crimes are being taken care of the more serious crimes like burglaries and robberies aren't getting that much attention. Once the residents start to notice the more serious crimes they will start getting fear and start to feel uncomfortable and unsafe in their own neighborhoods. So instead of the neighborhoods being safe and protected they will start to withdraw and the community relationships that existed will start to break down and it will start inviting more criminal activity. If something is not fixed like the broken street light people will fear to walk at night and that fear can create problems as stating that their neighborhoods aren't safe. This will make the residents in those neighborhoods the need to move to a different and safer environment. The broken windows theory goes with environmental theory because if crimes starts to rise in those neighborhoods it will influence young people (ages 13-25 because they haven't fully develop mentally) and from there it would be a chain reaction. There was a research done with 13,000 residents in 40 neighborhoods of six different cities to find the disadvantages of the broken windows theory and the results of this research was that crime and fear were linked together.

Also, broken windows theory can lead into law enforcement harassing innocent people by misinterpreting criminal activity in neighborhoods for example a young african american male in his twenties is in the corner waiting for the bus to go to school or work and the police can misinterpret that as him selling low level drugs like marijuana. Another great example of law

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enforcement harassing innocent people is the stop and frisk that happened in 2003-2013 in New York City. They made 100, 000 stops per year and 70% of those stopped were innocent and 90% of those people stopped were African Americans in which they felt they were being racially profiled.

As stated above broken windows is a theory in which law enforcement targets minor crimes in neighborhoods and the demographic of people who gets affected the most is the juveniles because they are being knuckleheads or following their friends by committing these minor crimes. It affects them in the long run if they get a record for getting arrested for vandalism or for littering and that record will not let them get into college or get a decent job. Not being able to get a job will demotivate them and will just make them get into more serious crimes. Last but not least, another disadvantage is the increase of arrests for minor crimes. These arrests will result in overpopulating jails as well increasing minorities with criminal records. With law enforcements increasing arrests they are emphasizing a zero tolerance for minor crimes and making an example of these individuals. A method that could work might be having discretion on giving out one or two warnings instead of arresting people for the minor crimes that they committed.

In conclusion, the broken windows theory may have its advantages but it also has many disadvantages. To date researcher have not been able to conclusively support or refute the broken windows theory but there is research on both views. I concentrated on the disadvantages of broken windows theory like how law enforcement can lead in to harassing innocent citizens, the misinterpretation of criminal activity in neighborhoods and how the increase of the minor crimes in the neighborhoods can increase arrests. A method that can work is giving out one or two warnings before arresting them for minor crimes like littering or public drinking. Another method can be helping the juveniles get into programs like boys and girls clubs or sports to keep them off the streets from committing minor crimes that may affect their future.

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