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CRIME PREVENTION

Specification: Background: How the features of neighbourhoods and a zero tolerance policy can influence crime. **Key research:** Wilson and Kelling (1982), The police and neighbourhood safety: Broken windows. **Application:** At least one strategy for crime prevention.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Outline how (a) the features of neighbourhoods and (b) zero tolerance policies can influence crime.
- Describe Wilson and Kelling's (1982) research into the police and into neighbourhood safety: Broken windows.
- Discuss methodological issues and debates in relation to the topic crime prevention.
- Apply knowledge of the features of neighbourhoods and a zero tolerance policy to suggest strategies for crime prevention.

How the Features of Neighbourhoods and A Zero Tolerance Policy Can Influence Crime

The cost of crime to the community is high. Crime prevention refers to a wide range of actions and behaviours that are designed to reduce the likelihood of crime by making it more difficult to commit a crime, or by making it less worthwhile. Some methods of crime prevention may involve whole communities and neighbourhoods, whereas others may be as simple as locking car doors and having a burglar alarm installed. In this background section, the features of neighbourhoods and zero tolerance policies are considered as ways to prevent crime.

Features of Neighbourhoods

Some neighbourhoods experience more crime and antisocial behaviour than others, and one important factor is the environmental features of neighbourhoods. Oscar Newman was an architect who began to consider how the features of neighbourhoods, in particular housing design, could influence crime. He found that high rise flats had become increasingly popular, but their residents were experiencing rising crime and a poor quality of life. Newman (1972) introduced the concept of 'defensible space'; space is considered defensible if it can be clearly perceived as belonging to a particular person or small group of people.

An issue with blocks of flats is that their design means there are numerous spaces that do not belong to anyone: stairwells, landings, parking areas, shared gardens, etc. The significance of these areas is not recognised because residents feel a diminished sense of responsibility for them. Residents in blocks of flats also struggle to distinguish who lives where, both in the flats and in their



neighbourhood, which makes identifying potential criminals difficult. Newman argued that these factors lead to a reduced sense of community, with criminal activity less easily detected or challenged. Therefore, a well-designed neighbourhood might be the key to crime prevention.

Newman and Franck (1972) investigated the relationship between features of neighbourhoods and their effect on crime. They studied two housing developments in New York. The first, Van Dyke, was a series of high rise flats. The second, Brownsville, was a series of walk-up buildings, each built around a courtyard. The developments each housed a similar number of residents, but crime rates were found to be higher in Van Dyke. Newman looked at the differences between the two developments and believed that the reasons for the differences in crime rates were as follows: Brownsville was built around courtyards and this gave greater opportunity for surveillance, so strangers were more likely to be recognised and challenged. In Brownsville, the residents were more likely to keep their doors open and let their children play outside. This developed a sense of community and enabled neighbours to meet each other. In Van Dyke, on the other hand, parents were unlikely to let their children play out, and when they did, their offspring were usually involved in some form of vandalism.

From his observations of neighbourhoods, Newman developed a theory to reduce crime in housing, in low socioeconomic areas. He said that the establishment of 'defensible space' was required. This operates by subdividing large portions of public spaces and assigning them to individuals and small groups of people to use and control as their own private areas. The criminal will be isolated because his turf is removed. Even those criminals who live within a community, or housing development, will find their movements severely restricted. Therefore 'defensible space' does not automatically catch the criminal, but it prevents opportunities for crime in the first place.

Zero Tolerance Policy

Zero tolerance policing is a type of policing that involves dealing with all kinds of crime, rather than just serious offences. It is based on the following core principles:

- All types of criminal acts should be addressed in order to prevent escalation to more serious crime.
- Police officers should confidently tackle even the lowest level of crime and anti-social behaviour with low intensity, humane methods.

One example of zero tolerance policing is found in New York. New York had long been known as one of the crime hot spots of the world. The zero tolerance policing system was pioneered by William Bratton, who was working as Police Commissioner in New York in 1994. Upon taking up his post, Bratton noticed the poor record of crime in the city. He also noted there was an intense pressure on police officers to investigate and solve crimes quickly, with an over-reliance on motorised policing over foot patrols. Bratton refocused the effective policing away from detecting crime and criminals and introduced a new focus on reducing those crimes that negatively affected the quality of life. Dual emphasis was given not only to tackling serious crime but also to reducing low-level crime such as vandalism and loitering. He employed around 7,000 more police officers, many of whom were to engage with the community during foot patrols. His approaches to policing led to a significant reduction in crime rates of 37% in three years and to a 50% reduction in homicides.

Although it seems clear that Bratton's zero tolerance approach was effective, it should be noted that the reduction in crime could have been due to a number of other factors, for example, more police officers patrolling on foot, consequently deterring potential criminals, and the natural fall in crime rates from 1990.

Key Research: Wilson & Kelling (1982)

Aim: The aim of the article was to challenge existing beliefs about the fear of crime and the role of the police. The authors explored the links between disorder and anti-social behaviour to subsequent occurrences of serious crime in communities.

Method: The article consists of three sections: safe neighbourhoods, the changing role of the police, and maintaining order. This article is a discussion piece that proposes a theory of neighbourhood safety and crime, and therefore, does not use a particular sample. However, the authors do make reference to one case in detail - the Newark foot patrol experiment. Newark is a city in New Jersey USA that took part in a state-wide initiative, started in the mid-1970s, called the 'safe and clean neighbourhoods' programme. The programme was designed to improve the quality of community life by putting more officers on foot patrol on the street. Although popular with politicians, the initiative was unpopular with police chiefs who saw foot patrols as reducing police mobility. It was also disliked by many police officers who viewed it as hard work and punishment because they were outside in all weathers.

The researchers also engaged in what could be considered naturalistic participant observation of police officers. Kelling accompanied different officers on foot patrol over many hours, observing their interactions with members of the community throughout neighbourhoods in Newark.

Results: After five years, a review of the programme found no decrease in crime rates. Nevertheless, the evaluation did find that residents reported feeling that crime had been reduced and were taking fewer behavioural precautions, for instance, not staying at home behind locked doors because they felt more secure. The authors suggested that, rather than catching serious criminals, the officers were preventing crime through maintaining public order. Officers saw their job to keep an eye on strangers, while members of the community felt relieved and reassured when police helped maintain order. Residents felt more confident to report disorder if they felt something would be done about it. Wilson and Kelling suggested that the use of police vehicles was a physical and mental barrier to their engagement with members of the community and to having their presence felt.

The broken windows theory: Wilson and Kelling proposed a situational explanation of crime, which is known as the 'broken windows' metaphor. The idea behind the theory is that disorderly neighbourhoods lead to serious crimes. Disorder is a trigger for fear in residents as they see disorder as an indication that serious crime is on the rise. The authors argue that disorder and crime are inextricably linked. They draw on the well-established idea that when one window is smashed in a building and left unrepaired, psychologists and police come to expect that the rest of the windows will soon be broken. Wilson and Kelling suggest that this is true in any neighbourhood because a broken window left unrepaired suggests that no one cares about the property. The theory of broken windows has an effect on the attitudes of residents. They become isolated from neighbours and less concerned with or involved in what happens in their community. For the elderly, this can have a very negative effect; they are most vulnerable and least likely to be able to move out of a neighbourhood that has fallen into decay. Out of fear, they may choose to stay at home behind locked doors to minimise the risk of becoming a victim. The authors suggest that disorderliness in a community leads to increased fear of crime, isolation from others and a lack of faith in police to act in the interest of the community.

The theory was supported by research by **Zimbardo (1969)**. He arranged for a car without license plates to be parked with its bonnet up on a street in the Bronx, New York (an area of high crime rates) and also in Palo Alto, California (a low crime area). In the Bronx the car was vandalised quickly, followed by random destructive acts such as parts being torn off and upholstery being ripped. In Palo Alto the car was left untouched for more than a week. Zimbardo then intervened by smashing it with a sledgehammer; within

a few hours, the car was vandalised. He concluded that all areas are vulnerable to criminal invasion where there is a breakdown of community controls.

Wilson and Kelling point to a pattern of policing that has led to urban decay. Police are now becoming crime fighters, making more arrests, solving more crimes and gathering evidence. The authors suggest that this changed the focus of police work away from community relations. So applying the broken windows metaphor to crime, tackling low-level anti-social behaviours such as drunk and disorderliness is not a priority for officers. The authors suggest that foot patrol officers have a key role in building community relations and collaborating with residents to prevent crime in ways that are difficult to do from inside a police car, and that police must keep order as well as fight crime.

Wilson and Kelling suggest the following strategies could help communities with crime prevention: Tenant organisations can hire off-duty police officers for patrol work in their buildings; it is more successful than hiring private security guards; police officers should be encouraged to go to work on public transport where they can enforce rules about smoking, drinking and disorderly conduct and those not following these rules can be ejected; police should protect communities as well as individuals and recognise the importance of maintaining intact communities without broken windows.

Conclusion: In this article, the authors conclude that the relationship between low-level and serious crime can be understood using the broken windows theory and that public order should be created and maintained collaboratively by police and the community.

Methodological Issues and Debates

- **USEFULNESS:** Wilson and Kelling's and other research in situational crime prevention can be considered useful. Working with police officers and communities and studying the influence of crime on neighbourhoods is a good alternative to working with offenders. Situational crime prevention considers risk factors involved in communities such as the type of neighbourhood, the type of policing and the type of residents, and aims to develop initiatives to improve crime conditions in society.
- **REDUCTIONIST:** However, Wilson and Kelling's research is based on an article that proposes a theory of broken windows. The theory sets forth a situational explanation of crime: that disorderly neighbourhoods lead to serious crimes and that disorder and crime are inextricably linked. They propose that if order is maintained and minor crimes are also identified, then crime will be reduced. This theory can be seen as reductionist because other extraneous variables occurring in communities, besides maintaining order, could account for criminal activity. For example, homicide rates in New York naturally declined as the use of crack cocaine decreased. Thus a more holistic approach should be considered.
- **FREE WILL VERSUS DETERMINISM:** The issue of free will versus determinism is important here. Wilson and Kelling's theory of broken windows can be considered deterministic because they suggest that even single instances of anti-social behaviour can result in more serious problems for communities.
- **PSYCHOLOGY AS A SCIENCE:** This piece of research would support the view that psychology is not a science. It is an article published online and is largely based on anecdotal evidence, some personal experiences and an evaluation of the project. The study, therefore, lacks many of the features of science, including a lack of control of extraneous variables, objectivity, replicability and standardisation. Consequently, the validity of any conclusions should be approached with caution.
- **SAMPLING BIAS:** Another issue with this study is that of sampling bias. This study was based on the Safe and Clean Neighbourhoods Program based in New Jersey USA, in the 1970s. Whether such a

programme would have the same results in other communities and other countries is questionable. Zimbardo, though, suggests that the Broken Window model is generalisable to different areas, but research outside of the USA would be useful.

Exam Hint: As you can see, the key research is based on an article that proposes a theory rather than a piece of research. Therefore, the more common evaluative issues you may be confident in using will not apply here to Wilson and Kelling's research; but issues such as psychology as a science and sampling may be relevant. This means this section is difficult to evaluate, as many of the methodological issues and debates surround the concepts of usefulness, free will versus determinism, reductionism and most importantly individual versus situational explanations of crime. Ensure that you fully understand each of these terms and can apply them confidently to the research in this area. Do bear in mind, though, that the 'issues' questions relate to the whole topic area, rather just the key research. So being familiar with the methodological issues of Zimbardo's study into broken windows is advisable.

Critical Thinking

Ethnocentrism refers to a bias in interpretation. It can be defined as a tendency to use one's own cultural or ethnic group norms and values to define the norm for everyone. It is not ethnocentric to select a sample from one particular culture, but it would be ethnocentric to make the assumption that findings from one cultural group might easily be applied to another. Much methodological research into features of neighbourhoods and zero tolerance policing has been conducted in the UK and USA. How might research in this area be considered ethnocentric? Think about how people in different countries and cultures live their lives and the types of crimes committed.

Application: Strategies for Crime Prevention

Situational crime prevention is a radical move away from traditional approaches that primarily target offenders. Crime is reduced by looking at different aspects of the environment in an attempt to minimise the opportunity for crime or make crime risks appear too risky. From the research outlined so far, you should already be able to consider three strategies for crime prevention. Newman's theory on defensible space may be considered here, as can zero tolerance policing and the broken windows theory.

Neighbourhood Watch Programmes: Another strategy to consider is that of increasing the risk of detection. The idea of increasing the risk of getting caught relates to the idea of maintaining defensible spaces in communities. **Neighbourhood watch programmes** can increase the risk of detection by bringing ordinary members of the community together to increase surveillance, reporting and deterrence of local crime. A volunteer resident coordinator liaises between the police and the community. They receive information and equipment to help prevent crime and encourage vigilance, such as luminous marker kits (for marking personal property such as bikes), window stickers and signs to publicise the scheme. Personal safety alarms may also be distributed. All of this equipment can then be made available to members. Neighbourhood watch programmes have been shown to be an effective crime prevention method.

CCTV: CCTV (Closed-circuit television) is a strategy used to deter criminal behaviour. It is designed to change the environment where crime occurs, unlike other strategies that may try and change the attitudes of criminals. CCTV acts as a deterrent because it increases the chances of the offenders being identified, is an effective way of collecting evidence, and while being viewed live can mobilise a response to catch the offenders. **Gill et al. (2005)** have found that CCTV is most effective at reducing theft of and from vehicles, but has little effect on violent crimes.

CCTV can differ in the type of monitoring that takes place. **Passive monitoring** occurs in CCTV systems that record activity for later examination; the footage can then be used as evidence. **Active monitoring** is where people watch the footage in real-time; this can increase the threat of identification and help

mobilise a response as the operators can quickly and easily inform the police of criminality and the situation can be responded to.

Possible Exam Questions

- (a) Using Wilson and Kelling's (1982) article, discuss how the features of a neighbourhood and zero tolerance policing can prevent crime. (10)
- (b) Assess the individual and situational debate with regard to crime prevention. (15)
- (c) A local neighbourhood has recently spent a large sum of money on new playground equipment. However, the local parish council has received several complaints that the equipment is being vandalised and the playground is used as an area where teenagers socialise and drink alcohol late at night.

Suggest a strategy the local police could use to reduce anti-social behaviour in this area. (10)

SAMPLE

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