Editorial: Application of Broken Window Theory for Crime Reduction: A Case of Karachi City

This editorial comprises of two parts: a brief introduction to the Broken Window Theory and its possible application for crime reduction in Karachi and an overview of the articles included in this issue.

On September 28, 2017 Geo.tv published a news report with the caption “Knife attacks on women spread fear in Karachi.” This report grabbed the attention of several people across Pakistan. Soon afterward a series of incidents of knife attacks happened and they went viral on social media. Among other things these incidents compel us to think of an appropriate solution to respond and prevent such attacks in the urban city of Karachi. Looking at this grim situation of Karachi and the fear of women, I recalled a reading an experiment done by a Psychologist of Stanford University named Philip Zimbardo on human nature in the year 1969. Zimbardo (1970/1969) took two similar nature cars and placed one in the Bronx, N.Y, while the other in Palo Alto, Calife. He soon removed the plates from both the cars and started observing the scenes. Zimbardo observed that people in the Bronx started stealing parts from the car right after ten minutes. People were so quick that they took all the valuables from the car within three days in the Bronx and left it as a source of entertainment. They used to punch the windows and put off the pain reducing it to a mere trash box. However, to his surprise nothing adverse happened with the car in Palo Alto. Soon Zimbardo with the help of a sledgehammer smashed a part of the car in front of other people, which got the attention of passersby. They also took the hammer and started blowing the car. Resultantly, the car was demolished within few hours. This experiment leads to the creation of Wilson & Kelling (1982) famous Broken Window Theory of crime. Wilson & Kelling (1982) believed that if a shattered window remains unrepaired, people would start breaking the remaining portion. Their assumption is that a broken window conveys the message that no one is taking care, hence breaking more, costs nothing with zero penalties. The “broken window” became a metaphor for ways behavioral norms break down in a community (Petersen, 2004). This theory asserts that people start imitating those who discredit the norms of a community, which eventually result in a macro level distress. Wilson & Kelling conjured the illustration that a broken window left unrepaired will soon prompt
the breaking of all other windows in a building (Welsh, Braga & Bruinsma, 2015).

This theory was later used by different police departments of the United States. The application of broken window model of policing has significantly decreased the crime rates. For instance, a study conducted by Corman & Mocan (2005) mentioned that the number of serious crimes dropped significantly in the United States as a result of aggressive policing at lower level. For example, property crimes dropped by 65% while violent crimes decreased by 56% in 90s (Corman & Mocan, 2005:1).

In Karachi, presence of such unrepaid broken windows is accelerating the crime rate. At the micro level, these broken windows can be found in streets in the form of pick pocketing, car theft, robberies, drug sale, mobile snatching and the latest knife attacks on women. A well-established sequence followed the occurrences of these crimes. Hence, the contemporary plight of Karachi demands the use of broken window policing. The abundance of broken windows in this city made the columnist of Los Angeles Times Magnier (2013) call “Karachi as nation’s crime capital”. This situation of insecurity led the middle-class to hire services of private guards. It is worth noting that the prevalence of these crimes gave birth to more heinous crimes in the city, which include target killing, suicide bombing, and other terrorist activities. For instance, the Samaa News (2017) reports that the money obtained through street crimes in Karachi was used for proscribed organizations. Similarly, Ayub (2015) states that billions of rupees obtained through crimes have given impetus to terrorism. Moreover, it is also a source of funding for the old gang war in Lyari.

In the past, the Karachi city police adopted different actions and policing models to curb the street crimes. The police carried out major operations with the assistance of the Rangers and other law enforcement agencies against the mafias. However, the effective use of all these operations is still questionable due to the existence of a large number of broken windows and the prevalence of high crime rate. It is therefore imperative for Karachi police to adopt a more focused model in approaching city’s crimes and minimizing the likelihood of the same. In this regard, adoption of broken window policing seems the best solution for minimizing the crime. This is because of two reasons: it is proactive in nature and it places deliberate emphasis on micro settings from where originates the trivial or pity natured crimes. Moreover, it has a potential to bridge the gap between the police and the community thereby
developing a trustworthy relationship. The city police should start addressing the broken window issue and they are then likely to reap the benefits of crime reduction.

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Now, I would like to introduce the articles published in this issue. The issue begins with Farah Zaidi’s interesting essay on the use of insect evidence in criminal investigation. She asserts that forensic entomology is the utility of arthropods/insects in legal investigations. Zaidi in her essay states that forensic entomology is helpful in estimating time of death. However, the science of forensic entomology is in its initial stage in Pakistan. At the end, the author argues that in Pakistan entomological evidence is ignored as maggots on a corpse are considered disgusting and are often discarded. For the delivery of justice, insect specimens, such as maggots and flies must be considered as physical evidence just as blood stains, hairs, or any other biological material.

Rahman Ullah and Sohail Ahmad’s study is qualitative in nature and evaluates the legality of arming civilians from a critical standpoint. Authors discuss the strategy of arming the people to counter the threat to militant in FATA. Furthermore, the government time and again surpasses laws at the time of unrest or war. Rahman Ullah and S. Ahmad conclude that neither the Constitution of Pakistan nor the Frontier Crimes Regulations allows the establishment of private militias.

Safdar Hussain and Niaz Muhammad’s paper is about corporal punishment that has serious repercussions for children’s wellbeing as far as their academic performance is concerned. Hussain and Muhammad discuss the social impact of corporal punishment on public schools’ students. This quantitative study reveals that the corporal punishment results in school dropout and this way causes aggression within the students. At the end, the authors suggest to ban corporal punishment as well as sensitize the teachers so that adverse implications for schooling may be avoided.

Fida Mohammad and Muhammad Shafiq Khan’s paper discusses much debated FATA reforms. Mohammad and Khan historically contextualize Frontier Crimes Regulations as well as its political economy. They argue that the genesis of FCR started in response to the rising crime rate in Peshawar valley after the British replaced Sika Sahi. Mohammad & Khan reveal that there are vested interests that would like to keep FATA isolated and backward. They keep on narrating that Malakan, FATA administration, contractors and other beneficiaries of
the status quo would like to keep business as usual because they have symbiotic mutual benefits. In short, the authors believe that in the presence of strong political agents, FCR will enjoy the special role.

Rahila Riasat et al have conducted a comparative study by gauging emotional intelligence and aggression among juvenile delinquents and non-delinquents. Their study explores the nature of the relationship between emotional empathy, emotional intelligence and reactive/proactive aggression. They reveal that the juvenile delinquents have a high level of proactive and reactive aggression than non-delinquents. Further to it, delinquents have less emotional empathy than non-delinquents.

Noor Sanauddin and Khalid Mahmood’s study highlights an alarming issue of suicide in prisons of England and Wales. They argue that the suicidal tendency among inmates in England and Wales is increasing and it requires an urgent attention. Their library-based research reviewed the common causes and suicide patterns in the prison and evaluates contemporary strategies of preventing suicides among inmates. The article suggests that majority of inmates who killed themselves did so by hanging while the first thirty days of imprisonment and remand were highlighted as the high risk time.

There is rapid growth of incidences of sexual harassment in the metropolitan cities across Pakistan. Tahira Jabeen et al examine sexual harassment in relation with mobility of women in Lahore. The study concludes that staring, cat calls and body touch are the common type of harassment in Lahore while virtually no female is safe from these menaces. Jabeen et al emphasized on the strict role of law in curbing sexual harassment.

Shahla Tabassum and Rukhsana Hasan’s article discusses the implications of spousal violence on women. They argue that spousal violence is considered as a means of controlling women in Pakistan. Tabassum & Hasan believed that there is always a threat of violence in an unhealthy relationship. The study highlighted moodiness of the husband, poverty, interference of the in-laws, infertility, and infidelity as reasons of dispute among married couples.

One of the major problems of youth in Pakistan is cyber bullying. Sumera Batool et al explore the effects of cyber bullying on youth in their article. The authors state that cyber bullying affects the psyche of youth, which ultimately results in negative consequences. The negative consequences may include emotional disturbance, conflicts in relationships and low academic performance. Batool et al further reveal
that the girls are more vulnerable and are likely to suffer more than the boys.

Muhammad Feyyaz’s study as the last one to appear in this issue but indeed an important one. It undertakes systematic critique of the existing explanations of terrorism longevity, especially their constitutive variables. The article employs grounded theory approach by drawing upon multi-source qualitative data to discern factors preserving oppositional violence. The article also scrutinized the merit of theoretical assumptions and evolved from empirical context.

References:

Zia Ullah Akhunzada
Assistant Editor (PJC)
PhD Candidate Universiti Sains Malaysia