

**Broken Windows, Ageing Prisons and the  
‘Dark Corners of Prison Violence’:  
Re-examing the role between carceral spaces,  
boundaries and prison violence**



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# Introduction



- Overwhelmingly prisons are described, constructed and imagined as violent places.
- Recorded levels of prison violence are at a 10 year high.
- But, there is considerable variation across the estate, and examples of prisons which are bucking the general trend.

# Preventing Prison Disorder



- 2 models:
  1. Situational Crime Prevention (Wortley, 2002)
  2. Social Crime Prevention (Sparks et al, 1995)
- Sparks et al (1995: 316) question: ‘How far are these modes of control in tension with one another or can they be successfully reconciled?’

# Methods



- Team approach
- 9 months ethnographic fieldwork
- Formal interviews (55 with young men and 8 with staff)
- Surveys
- Focus groups (8)
- Continuous hours of informal dialogue
- Process of change and ‘transformation’

# Mending the Broken Windows



“The general environment in Brinsford was, with the exception of one unit, very poor .... Communal areas were dirty and in need of refurbishment and many cells could only be described as squalid. Many were filthy and covered in graffiti, but most striking was the condition of windows. We entered a significant number of cells where window panes were missing and prisoners were forced to improvise coverings. In our view many of these cells were not, at the time, fit for occupation. It was concerning that managers and staff seemed incapable of seeing this or effecting a meaningful intervention or escalation to put these very obvious inadequacies right. Although, at a superficial level, engagement between staff and prisoners seemed satisfactory, it was against this basic lack of respect that the quality of relationships needed to be judged.”

(HMIP, 2014: 5)

# Mending the Broken Windows



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# Increasing Freedom of Movement



- Removal of gates
- Allowing unescorted movements
- Such decisions may appear counter-intuitive but reduced violence in key areas
- This is not to say that the change was easy for staff

# One Piece of the Puzzle



- Situational changes clearly had a positive impact but might not have done so without wider improvements
  - Governance – ‘put law back into the place’
  - Policy changes
  - Cultural changes
  - Procedural justice
  - Putting people in the right places
  - Support for the most vulnerable

# Conclusion



- Environmental and situational changes are important but cannot work in isolation
- Easing control can only be effective if there is operational grip
- The situational and social crime prevention models pose a false dichotomy and overlook other factors that relate to the ‘habitus’, the quality of prison life and prison order