

A case study on correlation between assertiveness and bystander effect

Mrs. Bhagyashree Kulkarni^{1*}, Miss. Mamta Kharde², Miss. Vaishnavee Kale³

ABSTRACT

Bystander effect is a phenomenon in which individuals are less likely to offer help to a victim when others are present. Although people may experience genuine concern in emergency situations, they might not always decide to help. This effect is often associated with the effect of groupthink or the herd mentality whereas assertiveness is associated with characteristics such as critical thinking, being self-assured and confident and taking initiative in social situations. The current study is the pilot research work based on case study and survey method. It studies the relationship between bystander effect and assertiveness in the age group of 18-25 years in Mumbai city. The survey was conducted with the help of tests and questionnaire. Out of 200 collected samples, 136 samples showed correlation between bystander effect and assertiveness. It was observed that individuals with high level of assertiveness showed less bystander effect. In several case studies, the relation between the bystander effect and assertiveness were observed. This survey was conducted to support these case studies and provide sufficient evidence to correlate the bystander effect and assertiveness of an individual.

Keywords: *Bystander; Bystander effect; Assertiveness*

Bystander effect is “the phenomenon in which the presence of people influences an individual’s likelihood of helping a person in an emergency situation” (John Darley and Bibb Latané, 1968). The greater the number of bystanders, the less likely it is for anyone of them to provide help to a person in distress. Basically, under this phenomenon, when there are fewer people in the scene or a person is alone, he/she is more likely to feel responsible to take some sort of action. On the other hand, if there are many people, there occurs a diffusion of responsibility and no single person is entirely responsible which then causes inaction. Bystanders often don’t try to help because they may be concerned for their own safety, don’t know what they should do to help or afraid that they may be picked on.

¹HOD and Assistant Professor- Department of Forensic Psychology, Institute of Forensic Science, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

²S.Y.BSc Student-Institute of Forensic Science, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

³ S.Y.BSc Student-Institute of Forensic Science, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India.

*Responding Author

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The concept of bystander effect was first demonstrated and popularized by social psychologists John M. Darley and Bibb Latané in 1968 after the murder case of Kitty Genovese in New York City (1964). The 28-year-old woman was brutally murdered outside her apartment. The attack lasted for around 30 minutes as she was stabbed 14 times, still not even a single person at the apartment came to assist her or call the police. This case was the major influence for Darley and Latané's research. In 1969, Bibb Latané and Judith Rodin conducted an experiment around a woman in distress, where subjects were either alone, with a friend, or with a stranger. 70% of the people alone called out or went to help the woman after they believed she had fallen and was hurt, but when paired with a stranger only 40% offered help. Additional research by Faul, Mark, using data collected by EMS officials when responding to an emergency, indicated that the health severity of the situation was correlated with the response of bystanders. Latané and Rodin (1969) suggested that in ambiguous situations, bystanders may look to one another for guidance, and misinterpret others' lack of initial response as a lack of concern. This causes each bystander to decide that the situation is not serious. A meta-analysis (2011) of the bystander effect reported that "The bystander effect was attenuated when situations were perceived as dangerous compared with non-dangerous, perpetrators present compared with not present and whether the costs of intervention were physical or non-physical. This pattern of findings is consistent with the arousal-cost-reward model, which proposes that dangerous emergencies are recognized faster and more clearly as real emergencies, thereby inducing higher levels of arousal and hence more helping." Timothy Hart and Ternace Miethe used data from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) and found that the bystander effect was present in 65% of the violent victimizations in the data. Half of the attacks in which bystander effect occurred were those where the victim and bystander were strangers.

As the study expanded beyond the initial concern with the number of bystanders, Latané and Darley (1970) proposed that the likelihood of a person engaging in prosocial actions is determined by a series of decisions that must be made quickly in the context of emergency situations. The decisions or steps involved in deciding whether to help or not are: noticing that something unusual is happening, correctly interpreting an event as an emergency, deciding that it is your responsibility to provide help, deciding that you have the knowledge and/or skills to act and making the final decision to provide help. If all of these decisions are positive then only actual helping occurs and the bystander effect is overcoming. Several factors contribute to the bystander effect, including ambiguity, group cohesiveness, and diffusion of responsibility that reinforces mutual denial of a situation's severity. There are several types of bystanders: Assistants (who help the bully and join in the bullying), Reinforcers (who provide support to the bully), Outsiders (stay away not taking sides, providing the bully with silent approval), Defenders (comfort the victim, try to actively stop the bullying), Passive defenders (not involved but dislike the bullying).

Darley and Latané (1968) conducted a research on diffusion of responsibility. The findings suggested that in case of an emergency, when people believe that there are other people around, they are less likely or slower to help a victim because they believe someone else will take responsibility. People may also fail to take responsibility for a situation depending on the context. They may assume that other bystanders are more qualified. They may also be afraid of being superseded by a superior helper for offering unwanted assistance.

The tendency to show bystander effect can be influenced by some situational or external factors. Hayden, Jackson, & Guydish (1984); Shaw, Borough & Pink (1994) states that we are more likely to help people who are similar to ourselves than people who are dissimilar.

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Further research by Hodges and colleagues (2010) suggests that similarity to others increases our empathic concern for them, and our understanding of what they are experiencing and thus we intend to help them more. Racial and ethnicity differences between victim and bystander also decrease the probability of helping (Richards & Lowe, 2003; Tukuitonga & Bindman, 2002). Higgins & Shaw (1999); Weiner (1980) found out that if we believe that the victim is to be blamed or believed to be responsible for their problem the tendency to show bystander effect is more. Although the presence of bystanders who fail to respond, inhibits helpfulness. It is equally true that the presence of a helpful bystander provides a strong social model, and the result is an increase in helping behavior among the remaining bystanders (Bryan & Test, 1967).

A literature review from researchers Ruud Hortensius and Beatrice de Gelder in “Current Directions in Psychological Science” (2017) outlines a new theoretical model of bystander effect that incorporates neural, motivational, and dispositional aspects. They suggest that personality plays a key role in a bystander’s reflexive or reflective reactions, and conclude that we don’t consciously choose apathy, but rather reflexively behave in that way. Various personality traits are suggested to be responsible for the behavior of bystanders.

Assertiveness is one of a personality trait which is found out to be related to the bystander effect. Oxford Dictionary defines assertiveness as “Forthright, positive, insistence on the recognition of one’s rights”. It is also defined as “the tendency to behave in assertive, forceful and self-assured ways” (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). People who are assertive clearly and respectfully communicate their wants, needs, positions, and boundaries to others. The level of assertiveness demonstrated in any human community is a factor of social and cultural practices. During the second half of the 20th century, assertiveness was increasingly singled out as a behavioral skill taught by many personal development experts, behavior therapists, and cognitive behavioral therapists. Assertiveness is often linked to self-esteem. The term and concept was popularized to the general public by books such as “Your Perfect Right: A Guide to Assertive Behavior” (1970) by Robert E. Alberti and Michael L. Emmons and “When I Say No, I Feel Guilty: How To Cope Using the Skills of Systematic Assertiveness” Therapy(1975) by Manuel J. Smith.

From a behavioral standpoint, assertive people are firm and react to positive and negative emotions without becoming aggressive or resorting to passivity. Assertiveness is often associated with higher self-esteem, confidence and supports critical thinking and effective communication. It also includes accepting responsibilities and being able to delegate to others, being able to admit mistakes and apologize, maintaining self-control and having an equal behavior towards everyone.

Hypothesis:

The current study is aimed to find the correlation between the bystander effect and the level of assertiveness of an individual. Since there has been a decrease in the prosocial behavior of the general public nowadays, there is a need to study the cause of it.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

This experiment is carried out using case studies and survey methods. It consists of two questionnaires- Rathus Assertiveness Scale (RAS) and Bystander Effect Test (BET). BET is authored by Mrs. Bhagyashree Kulkarni and co-authored by Miss. Mamta Kharde and Miss. Vaishnavee Kale. It is a 30 item questionnaire that measures the extent of bystander effect of

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the individuals in Mumbai city, Maharashtra population. The statements of the questionnaire were collected by reviewing various situations observed in daily life, in literatures and surveys. Along with this, RAS (developed by Dr. Spencer A. Rathus, 1973) which consists of 30 items and measures the level of assertiveness of an individual was also used. These two questionnaires were administered on total of 200 individuals belonging to the age group of 18-25.

Questionnaire

Bystander Effect Test (BET)

Age:-_____ Gender:-_____

Instructions: - This test consists of 30 statements. Respond to each of the given statements by selecting one from the five options given viz. Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely and Never. Make sure you answer all the questions. Even if a question does not seem entirely relevant, give the answer you consider will be most like you. There are no right or wrong answers and no time limit. In the statements given below, mark how often you would do something on a five-point scale of 0-4, where:

0-Always 1-Often 2-Sometimes 3-Rarely 4-Never

1. When there is an emergency which involves helping someone, I hesitate to help.
2. If I see a person dropping something, I would help him/her.
3. I would be the first person to help, if I see someone feeling dizzy in a train or bus.
4. I am most likely to help someone with a good appearance.
5. If I see some students tampering with the votes in college elections, I will report this to the college election committee.
6. If I see a lady have her purse taken by a thief, I would help her without hesitation.
7. I would offer my seat to an older person in a crowded public transport.
8. If I hear racist slurs directed towards the cashier in a store, I would hesitate to defend the cashier.
9. I believe that in an emergency situation, men are more likely to help than women.
10. I provide help to a beggar whenever I see any in a train or any public place.
11. I will probably assist someone in need only if given the chance to.
12. If I witness a road accident, I would hesitate to be the first person to help.
13. I am more likely to help someone if I am with my peers than alone.
14. I wouldn't hesitate to stand up against ragging and bullying in my hostel.
15. In my college, if I see a couple arguing loudly, I would try to diffuse the situation.
16. I would tell the teacher about a fellow student who's cheating in exams.
17. If I see a person harassing a girl in a public transport, I would speak up and help the girl even if other commuters are ignoring the situation.
18. I would hesitate to provide help to a disabled person to cross the road if I'm alone.
19. I am less likely to help a victim if I think he/she is to be blamed in that situation.
20. I believe that in emergency situations, elders should take the initiative to help.
21. If I see my classmates passing inappropriate comments to someone. I would ask them to stop.
22. I would hesitate to help if I don't know the course of action of helping in a situation.
23. I am less likely to help someone if I think that it will spoil my good mood.
24. At an election booth, if I see someone compelling other voters, I would report this to the concerned authorities.
25. I am less likely to help someone, when I'm in a hurry to reach somewhere.

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26. Most of the times, instead of helping because I'm genuinely concerned. I help to feel less guilty.
27. I would avoid to help an unknown person who requests for my mobile phone to make a call.
28. I can empathize but I hesitate to offer help to someone who needs it.
29. I am less likely to assist in emergency situations if among a group of strangers.
30. To some extent, I have experienced bystander effect in certain situations.

Case Studies

Death of Raymond Zach

Raymond Zach, a 53-year-old man living in California walked into the waters off Robert Crown Memorial Beach with an intention of committing suicide on the Memorial Day of the year 2011. He stood neck deep in water roughly 150 yards offshore for almost an hour. His foster mother called the emergency helpline for help and told them that he couldn't swim and was trying to drown himself. The police and the firefighters responded but did nothing to help Raymond. The firefighters asked the U.S coast guard boat to rescue him but no boat arrived at the scene. Firefighters later claimed that they did not have current training and certifications to perform land-based water rescue, and that funding for the program was cut. This claim was eventually found out to be false. Many civilians witnessed this incident on the beach as well as watched it from their homes across the beach but did nothing to help as they were expecting public safety officers to conduct the rescue. Some bystanders tried to help Raymond but were told not to intervene by the police present on the scene and let the public safety personnel handle the situation. A young woman finally entered the waters and pulled Raymond out to the shore. He later died at a local hospital of hypothermia.

Murder of Khaseen Morris

Khaseen Morris, a 16-year-old student, in September 2019 was killed in a violent brawl outside a strip mall Nassau County, New York. He later died the same night at the hospital, suffering from fatal injuries after being stabbed repeatedly in the chest. Morris was attacked by a group of teenagers as soon as he entered the area as he was seen walking with the ex-girlfriend of one of the attackers, Tyler Flach. Morris's close friend also got badly beaten by the group of boys when he tried to help. Around 50 to 70 people witnessed this brawl but no one came to Morris's rescue. Instead, many in the group continued take videos for social media and the video of Morris's murder went viral on the internet. No one intervened to assist the 16-year-old, even though he was outnumbered by a group of boys larger and older than him. The bystanders documented the whole incident rather than prevent it from happening.

2009 Richmond high school gang rape

A 15-year-old female student of Richmond High school in California was gang raped by group of young males in the school courtyard during the Homecoming dance on October 24, 2009. The victim was invited by a fellow classmate to join a group of males for drinking in a dark courtyard on campus. The victim, in her intoxicated state, was gang raped for almost two and a half hours, at times even with foreign objects. The victim was found unconscious under a picnic table and was shifted to the hospital in a critical condition. She was released from the hospital on Wednesday, October 28. Almost 20 people witnessed this heinous crime without calling 911 to report it. Many witnesses recorded the attack in their phones, cheered and made comments as the victim was being assaulted. Many witnesses didn't call the authorities as they feared retaliation from the perpetrators.

Murder of Amanda Froistad

Amanda Froistad, a five-year-old was murdered by her father Larry Froistad in the year 1995, in South Dakota. Larry Froistad, in a heavily inebriated state, set his house on fire, with Amanda trapped inside the house. Even though the death seemed unusual, the police did not prosecute Larry because the police personally knew Larry and could not believe he would murder someone. Amanda had also previously told her counsellor that she was being sexually abused but the case was not correctly followed up with the authorities, and Larry was not punished nor denied access to his daughter. In 1998, Froistad posted a confession of his murder on an online email list. He had also confessed to molesting his daughter to an online group of paedophiles. There were many different responses to his email but only 3 of 200 people reported the confession to concerned authorities.

DISCUSSION

Individuals who see or hear an emergency but are otherwise uninvolved are called bystanders. The bystander effect, or bystander apathy is a social psychological phenomenon that refers to the tendency of people to take no action in an emergency situation where others are present. The bystander effect was first demonstrated and popularized by social psychologists John M Darley and Bibb Latané in 1968 after they became interested in the topic following the murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964. Genovese was attacked and sexually assaulted by a man with a knife while walking home. Only a few bystanders had contacted the authorities as Genovese died. The story of Genovese's murder became a modern parable for the powerful psychological effects of the presence of others. It was an example of how people sometimes fail to react to the needs of others and more broadly how behavioral tendencies to act prosocially are greatly influenced by the situation.

The finding of Darley and Latané suggest that in the case of an emergency, bystanders do care about those in need of assistance but nevertheless often do not offer help. They also found that when people believe that there are other people around, they are less likely or slower to help a victim because they believe someone else will take responsibility. People may also fail to take responsibility for a situation depending on the context. They may assume that other bystanders are more qualified to help, such as doctors or police officers, and that their intervention would be unneeded. They may also be afraid of being facing the legal consequences of offering inferior and possibly dangerous assistance. Thus, intervention failure by bystanders is associated with failure to recognize the need for intervention (Oster-Aaland, 2009), failure to associate personal responsibility, and insufficient skills to intervene (Burn, 2009).

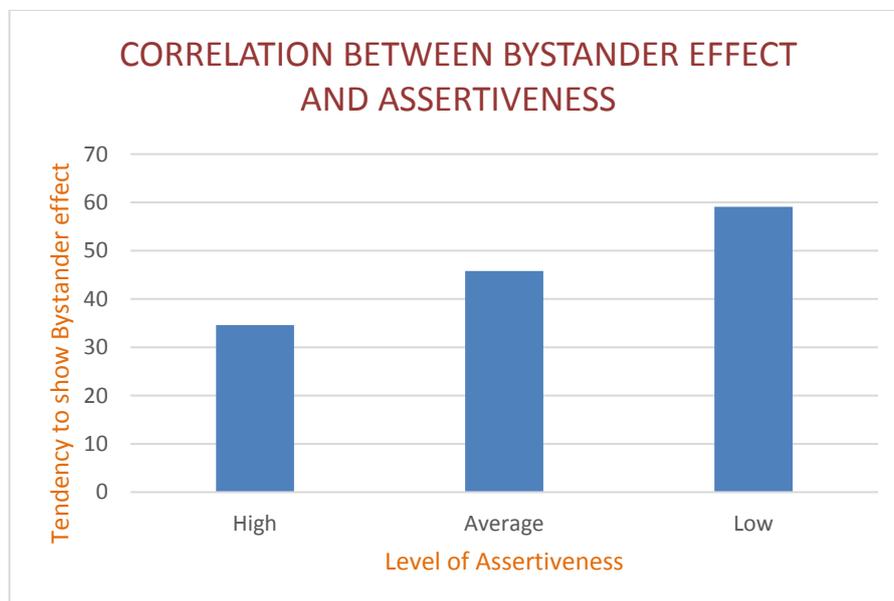
According to Latané and Darley's decision-making model, bystanders rationalize their decision on the basis of which choice (helping or not helping) will deliver the best possible outcome for themselves. The bystanders weigh the pros and cons of helping and are more likely to help when they view helping as a way to advance their personal growth, to feel good about themselves, or to avoid guilt that may result from not helping. Usually, the instantaneous response to an emergency is a feeling of distress and activation of the fight-freeze-flight system. Under these conditions, helping behavior does not occur, and the behavioral response is limited to avoidance and freeze responses.

Social influence also plays an important role in helping the bystander in the decision making process. The presence of others can influence the bystander's ability to realize that something is wrong and that assistance is required. However, in some cases, when other people act calmly in the presence of a potential emergency because they are unsure of what

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the event means, bystanders may not interpret the situation as an emergency and thus act as if nothing is wrong. Other social factors may also include having a close relationship with the victim or the individual in need of help (Levin, Prosser, Evans and Reicher, 2005), fear of negative evaluation or being judged by the peers (Berkowitz, 2009) and being of similar race or gender as the victim (Kunstman and Plant, 2008). The emotional state of the bystander also influences their decision-making process. Positive moods encourage bystanders to notice emergencies and provide assistance, whereas negative moods inhibit helping. However, emotions like guilt or sadness may also promote helping.

Significant correlation has been found between bystander effect and assertiveness in the age group of 18-25 years. Almost 80% individuals admitted to have experienced bystander effect in certain situations. 68% individuals possessing high level of assertiveness were found to show low bystander effect as their tendency to show bystander effect was just 34.6%. Whereas, individuals who were found to have average and low level of assertiveness were found to have 45.8% and 59.1% tendency to show bystander effect respectively. People with high assertiveness usually show high level of confidence, self esteem and stand up for their own as well as other people's rights in a positive and calm way. Therefore, as the results of the survey indicate, they tend to show less bystander effect. As they readily accept responsibilities and have an equal behavior towards everyone, they readily take the initiative in helping people irrespective of their physical appearance.



Correlation between bystander effect and assertiveness (based on the results of survey)

Also, according to the results of the survey, 54% individuals rarely considered someone's physical appearance as a factor in deciding to help them. This survey also infers that 76% individuals believed men are more likely to help than women in emergency situations. Many people also admitted that they would hesitate to help if they don't know the proper course of action of helping. As many as 64% people believe that in emergency situations, elders should take the initiative to help. The mentioned case studies also point to the fact that most of the people feel that it's not their responsibility to help and intervene in emergency situations. Thus, through this survey it has been observed that low assertiveness is one of the factors which contributes to the bystander effect in people.

CONCLUSION

Through this survey and case studies, it can be concluded that assertiveness and bystander effect are correlated. About 68% of individuals showed high level of assertiveness and less bystander effect. Hence, the outcome of this research indicates that the level of assertiveness is inversely proportional to the bystander effect.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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