

Sample literature review on bystander effect and helping behavior

[Experience](#), [Responsibility](#)



Current research on bystander intervention has produced many outcomes indicating that the presence of other people in a critical situation, especially bullying, reduces the probability that an individual will help. Diffusion of responsibility contributes to the bystander effect. This implies that a person does not feel the need to help someone in need if several people are also present since the responsibility is among those present. Most people believe that there exist safety in numbers, but there are times when a large crowd does not support a victim. According to Barlińska, Szuzter & Winiewski (2013), “ Bystanders are the social audience in many crime events, and their actions and reactions may affect both the risks of the onset of violence and its ultimate consequences to the victim”. Witnesses in such a situation may decide to walk away or intervene, directly or indirectly.

The aim of this literature review is to understand the causes of bystander effect. Witnesses of cyberbullying or bullying also face the challenges of bystander effect. A study conducted by Latané & Nida (1981) discusses the “ diffusion of responsibility” when other bystanders are present in an emergency situation as compared to when there is one witness with the sole responsibility of intervening in an emergency situation. In reality, the more people are available to assist, the less likely an individual would help because other people can do it instead. This study will explore whether the social responsibility or diffusion of responsibility explanation applies to helping behavior in an emergency. According to Latané and Nida (1981), two out of three children want to assist when they see bullying, and one of the best ways of stopping bullying is through helping.

Latané & Nida (1981) developed a model that bystanders follow to decide

whether they will provide help or not. According to this model, a bystander undergoes five steps before deciding to offer any help. However, helping response can be suppressed at any stage of the process resulting into no help. First, the bystander needs to notice occurrence of an event, but may fail to do so and fail to provide help. Second, the bystander should identify the event as an emergency, and in such case, the situation may appear ambiguous, preventing provision of any help. The bystander needs to take responsibility for helping out, but may avoid taking responsibility assuming that someone else will. Fourth, the bystander should decide on the appropriate response, but may underrate their competence to do so. Lastly, the bystander needs to implement that response, but may feel it is against their interest, especially in dangerous situations.

Research indicates that bystander effect does not seem to appear if another observer first influences helping response, which seems to contradict the concept of “diffusion of responsibility” (Karakashian, et al., 2006). This is to as conformity to social norms. The principle of social norms states that people use actions from others as cues to decide on the appropriate response to a given situation (Karakashian, et al., 2006). A research conducted, by Warneken (2013), to determine how social norms influence public littering concluded that social norms have a remarkable impact on behavior.

Numerous famous examples of Bystander Effect include two-year-old Axel Casian in the Turlock, California area, who was beaten to death by his father in public while friends, family members, strangers, and others stood by and did nothing to help the boy. Another example was the case of Kitty Genovese

in Queens, New York, who was stabbed to death by a serial rapist as 38 bystanders witnessed the act and failed to offer any help to the woman (Manning, et al. 2007). Such cases have elicited further research in the social psychology with the aim of identifying the best way of dealing with such situations.

Social influence in emergency refers to the likelihood of an individual to react based on the actions of others. If the people around view it as a nonemergency, the individual will be less likely to offer any help. According to Barlińska et al. (2013), bullying rarely takes place in the absence of an audience. The researchers note that children are around to witness bullying 85 percent of the time. Nevertheless, despite witnessing it, they rarely try to stop bullying, and may even encourage it unknowingly. If the children do not see any other intervening, they are less likely to take action. Another aspect of social influence observed by Barlińska et al. (2013) is the social norm of “minding one’s own business.” The fear of misunderstanding the situation or feeling that they should not involve into private affairs may deter intervention. Some may also fear involvement because of fear of becoming a victim of future crimes. Additionally, witnesses of cyber bullying and bullying often fear intervening for fear of victimization.

The two major factors that contribute to bystander effect include the presences of other people, which create diffusion of responsibility and behavior in a socially accepted norm. Diffusion of responsibility refers to a situation where bystanders do not feel the need to intervene because the responsibility to take action is to be shared among those present. The need

to behave in socially accepted way explanation holds that people use actions from others as cues to decide on the appropriate response.

References:

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