

A Study Among the Public on Bystander Behaviour on Crime Victimisation in Chennai City

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Abstract:

Victimisation in public places such as markets, streets, public transits and parks have become one of the most important concerns in urban areas especially at crowded places. In such incidents, bystanders could play an important role by either helping the victims or staying put. This study looked at public action and attitudes regarding bystander intervention. It focused on social, psychological, and legal factors that affect bystander behaviour including the diffusion of responsibility, fear of legal consequences, perceived personal risk, and social influence. A descriptive research design with a quantitative approach method was used. Data were collected from 200 respondents through a self-structured questionnaire that included vignette-based and Likert scale questions. Convenience and simple random sampling methods were applied. This study aimed to shed light on the reasons for the inaction of bystanders, the impact of public awareness about Good Samaritan protections, and how demographic and situational factors affect intervention behaviour. It also emphasizes the need for awareness programs and community-based strategies to promote the responsible bystander intervention and enhance public safety.

Keywords: Victimisation, Bystander behaviour, Public action, Diffusion of responsibility, Good Samaritan law

1. Introduction

Victimisation in public places like streets, parks, public transport systems and marketplaces has become an increasingly important social issue especially in crowded areas. Although these places are essential for our daily life, the chances for crime ranging from harassment and theft to serious offences would be displayed. In situations like these, the presence of bystanders who see an event without getting directly involved becomes crucial. They can either help by preventing harm or allow the situation to get worse on the other hand by not acting. A key idea for understanding such issues is the “Bystander Effect” theory which became widely known after the tragic murder of Kitty Genovese, which showed the number of witnesses who did not step in when a violent crime occurred. This incident led to significant research in social psychology especially by John Darley and Bibb Latané who showed that people are less likely to help when others are around them. This cause led to further explanations by several psychology factors. Public perception and social factors strongly influence the bystander behaviour. Cultural norms, levels of empathy and moral values determine whether the people would feel responsible to step in to help. In many

cases, lack of knowledge about protective laws, fear of legal issues and low trust in law enforcement discourage individuals from helping the victims. Additionally, worries about personal safety and possible punishments further reduces the chance of intervention even when people see that they need help. Understanding factors like these are crucial for encouraging responsible civic behaviour and improving public safety (Darley & Latane, 1968). Communal values are what shape traditional culture of India. Assistance for one another, support from the community and being morally obligated to help others could be applied since they are part of collectivist cultures. These types of cultures have created values like “seva” also known as “selfless service” and strong ties among the neighbours to help the struggling people. However, due to rapid urbanization, changing lifestyles and higher density of population, anonymity has been significantly increased which led to lack of communication between individuals. This creates the “Bystander effect” or the feeling of unwillingness to assist others out of fear since they don’t know that person who needs assistance. Certain obstacles such as fear of law enforcement considering whether something might go wrong, legal proceedings because of helping a victim and fear of being harassed have led to individuals hesitating to assist others or feeling comfortable to do so (Weitzman et al., 2020). The Good Samaritan guidelines were created to alleviate some of such barriers. Other kinds of barriers are lack of knowledge in first aid, fear for one’s own safety and uncertainty in intervening during a situation of emergency. It is the stark contrast between the traditional values of helping and lack of assisting in large urban cities that makes research about the bystander effect so important for understanding the population of India. Existing studies have looked closely into bystander effect, especially through the works of Bibb Latané and John M. Darley. However, important gaps remain cause most of the research has taken place in Western settings and controlled environments with little attention to the real-life situations in public in culturally diverse areas like urban India (Chaudhari, n.d.). This limits our understanding of how cultural norms, local views and social expectations affect the bystander behaviour in places like Chennai. Moreover, while earlier studies have shown factors like situational ambiguity or diffusion of responsibility, integrated research has been done very little that examines how various factors like perceived risk, crowd size, prior experience and social relationships interact to affect intervention decisions. Many studies focused on intentions rather than focusing on actual attitudes and perceptions. This caused a gap in understanding how people interpret and respond to certain situations involving victimisation in daily scenarios in public. Additionally, research on forensic implications of inaction of bystanders is limited. This includes its effects on preserving the evidence and reliability of witnesses. There wasn’t enough focus on finding practical measures to overcome obstacles and promote active bystander participation. The research on bystander effect has largely been conducted in the Western, controlled environments by researchers Bibb Latané and John Darley, with little to no study of bystander effects in actual urban settings in India. In Chennai, there’s a limited understanding of how societal and cultural expectations affect bystander behaviour. Individual factors have been analysed but limited and integrated analysis of the multiple influencing factors has occurred to this point. Additionally, most of the studies focused on the intentions rather than actual behaviour.

The study’s aim was to analyse the factors of this bystander effect to improve bystander intervention training and to enhance community safety strategies exploring the attitudes towards the bystander intervention as well as their behaviour when someone is a victim during a crime in Chennai including social, legal and psychological influences on a bystander’s willingness to assist someone during a time of emergency (Rahman & Mehnaz, 2024). Additionally, this research would examine the impact of personal risk, diffusion of responsibility, legal consequences and awareness on Good Samaritan protections. This

is an important finding about the role of bystanders in helping the victims during an incident in a public space which would inform awareness and intervention programs that encourage behaviour which depicts safety and responsibility. It also helps in providing useful insights for policymakers for designing the initiatives which helps in promoting crime prevention in public participation. It helps in identifying barriers which prevent the individuals' challenges. This study could also be helpful as a reference for the future researchers and the policymakers to contribute to some strategies which helps by reducing the severity and increase of crimes. (Asst. Professor, Dept. of Geography, Bharathi Womens College (A), Chennai-108, TN, India. et al., 2023)

2. Research Methodology

This study had used a descriptive research design along with the quantitative approach to explore public attitudes and behaviour towards bystander intervention during crime victimisation in Chennai city. The descriptive method was chosen to understand the perceptions, opinions and the responses from public during emergency situations in public places involving victims. Independent variables included the bystander effect including perceived severity, sense of responsibility, fear of legal and personal risks, awareness and training and situations uncertainty. Dependent variable included outcomes like intervention for analysing the behaviour of the bystander and their willingness to help a victim during situations of emergency. The quantitative approach had facilitated the collection of measurable data and the identification of patterns in bystander behaviour. This study focused on members of the general public aged from above 18 living in the city where the research was conducted in public areas like parks, streets, transits and other crowded urban areas where there are more incidents of victimisation likely to happen. A sample of 200 respondents were selected for the study. Simple random sampling method and convenience sampling techniques were used for choosing the participants. These methods allowed for gathering responses from the individuals with various demographic backgrounds such as gender, occupation and education. For the primary data, a self-structured questionnaire containing scenario-based questions including Likert scale methods were used to analyse perception and attitudes and open-ended questions were also added for additional insights relating to scenarios or incidents. The questionnaire consisted of factors that addressed the influence of bystander behaviour such as severity, fear, responsibility, uncertainty, diffusion, willingness of responsibility and the awareness of Good Samaritan protection. Articles, reports, online academic publications and journals related to bystander intervention and crime victimisation were gathered for the secondary data. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods including percentage analysis, graphical representations and tables. The hypotheses in this research are based on the relationship between the influencing factors and bystander behaviour. In the null hypothesis (H_0), there are no significance between psychological, social and legal factors and bystander intervention behaviour in public places. In alternative hypothesis (H_1), there is a significant relationship between these factors and the bystander behaviour in public places. Ethical considerations like voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent from the respondents were upheld throughout the research process.

3. Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis is carried out using Pearson Correlation formula $r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$
Where, r = Pearson correlation coefficient, x = Values in the first set of data, y = Values in the second set of

data, n= Total number of values to establish the relationship existing between the independent and the dependent variables in the study.

4. Result

Findings of this study revealed differences in bystander behaviour based on gender and situational circumstances from the responses when they behaved as bystanders. There were some differences in the report. Male respondents were more likely than the female respondents to show willingness to physically help in certain situations, especially involving assaults and weapons while female respondents reported hesitation and fear more than males did. However, both the genders indicated a preference to call the security or police than confronting an assailant.

The respondents were more likely to provide assistance when someone was having a medical emergency or when an elderly person or woman needed help. Most of them were much less likely to help when someone possessed a weapon cause of fear of harm or whether someone was experiencing domestic violence, hesitating due to uncertainty, or when there was a large crowd due to fear for their own safety, being personally responsible or involved in an accident and lack of personal responsibility. The respondents who were highly educated were the only ones aware of the Good Samaritan law.

Table 1: Table represents the correlation between the factors with intervention.

Factors	Correlation value	N	P value
Severity	0.445	200	0.202×10^{-10}
Fear	-0.194	200	0.002
Responsibility	0.5	200	0.238×10^{-13}
Uncertainty	-0.3721	200	0.289×10^{-07}
Diffusion of responsibility	-0.2449	200	0.236×10^{-03}
Likelihood to help	0.7615	200	0.191×10^{-38}

From the above table it is illustrated that severity has a moderate positive relationship with intervention ($\rho = 0.445$) with a strong significant value of P value = 0.202×10^{-10} . Fear and diffusion of responsibility have a weak negative correlation with intervention with $\rho = -0.194$ and $\rho = -0.2449$ with a significant value of P value = 0.002 and P value = 0.236×10^{-03} respectively. Responsibility and willingness to help have strong positive correlation with $\rho = 0.5$ and $\rho = 0.7615$ with the strong significance value of P value = 0.238×10^{-13} and P value = 0.191×10^{-38} which are statistically significant to reject the null hypothesis (H0) stating that the relationship between the selected factors with intervention is not due to random chances.

5. Discussion

In this research, analysis was done on the behaviour and attitudes of members towards society towards intervening as the bystanders in cases of criminal victimisation in Chennai city, India. The overall results show that a number of people do not intervene when witnesses see someone in danger for the fear for their personal risk, uncertainty and facing legal trouble as to how serious the emergency is. The results are consistent with the theory of Bibb Latané and John M. Darley which states that having other witnesses

present decreases the chance that a person would find it their responsibility to take action which in turn, affects the probability that they would take action. Consistent with previous research, respondents were much less likely to directly intervene on behalf of someone at risk of being harmed than to use indirect means of assisting someone. The study provided further evidence to support the existing research findings regarding impact of social influence and crowds on making decisions during an emergency situation. Many respondents indicated an expectation that others around them would respond in similar fashion, particularly in a crowded public environment. This behaviour was demonstrated in the previous research on bystander intervention regarding diffusion of responsibility. Additionally, the research indicated a relatively low level of awareness relating to good Samaritan protections, creating increased concern about potential legal action from the police investigation and legal system. These results correspond with earlier research conducted in India where the primary barriers to public intervention during the incidents of victimisation were identified as concerns over legal repercussions and concern for personal safety. In the current study, there were also differences on both the gender and situation. Women expressed greater level of concern regarding their personal safety while the younger people in contrast, reported being more willing to offer assistance to someone who would face danger. In addition, this study demonstrates that all bystanders were much more willing to assist people during emergencies in a medical setting or in situations involving the most vulnerable people. In other situations, such as domestic violence, intervention became increasingly less likely due to perceived fear or uncertainty. This study stresses the need for public safety awareness programs, community participation, legal education in order to promote responsible bystander intervention and improve public safety in the city.

6. Conclusion

This research focused on how the public perceived and acted in cases of victimisation that occurred in public places. This study aimed to determine how these responses were shaped by social and psychological influences or reasons, also identifying variations in the responses based on the demographic characteristics such as gender and individual perceptions of responsibility and safety. Findings suggested that although individuals may understand the importance of providing assistance to the victims, many of them remain reluctant to provide help due to fear or uncertainty in response to emergency situations. This study identifies the continuing relevance of the bystander effect within large urban spaces which requires significant increase in public knowledge enhanced protection through laws and greater availability of community education and training regarding the response from bystanders. In summary, This study provided a more comprehensive understanding of how public interventions occur and the ability to identify and encourage further bystander involvement and participants would allow policymakers, educators, law enforcement officials and social service organisations to continue to create safer and more responsible citizens.

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