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Piliavin et al. [Subway Samaritans]

The psychology being investigated

- Bystander apathy

Bystander: are people who are physically present at the scene of an event or incident but do not take an active part in helping others in need.

BYSTANDER APATHY: the term used to describe the lack of help offered in such situations.

- Diffusion of responsibility

When an incident is observed by more than one person, there may be diffusion of responsibility; the more people are present the less personal responsibility each individual feels.

AIMS

Piliavin et al. aimed to investigate factors affecting helping behaviour on a New York subway train. Specifically, they wanted to see how the following factors affected help offered to a passenger who collapsed in the carriage:

1. the type of victim: drunk or ill
2. the race of victim: black or white
3. modelled help provided by another passenger
4. number of people in the carriage (group size)

→ The method used was a field experiment - took place on a 7.5 minute express train between 2 New York stations.

Research Method

→ Independent measures design.

→ Covert observation.

Data collected by covert observers:

Observer 1: Recorded the no. of people in car.

- Their race & location of every passenger in the critical area.

- As well as, the no. of people helped the victim & their race, sex & location.

Observer 2: Recorded the race, sex & location of passengers in adjacent area, as well as time taken to assist after collapse.

NOTE: both observers noted the comments made by the passengers.

I.V: the condition of victim (drunk or ill)

the race of the victim (black or white)

how close the helpful model was to the victim

[critical or adjacent]

How quickly help was offered & group size

D.V: time taken for help to arrive (before & after

sex & race of first helper. modelled help]

Movement of passengers out of the critical area of carriage.

Comments.

PS - SAMPLE

- 4450 men & women
- 45 % black & 55 % white
- 8th Avenue train in New York City on weekdays (11:00 am - 3:00 pm)
- 15 April - 26 June 1968
- mean = 43 / critical area mean = 8.5
- Opportunity sample

PROCEDURE

4 teams of student researchers from the study University of Columbia carried out the study. On each trial, 2 males and 2 females boarded the train through different doors.

Females were observers. The male confederates took the role of the victim and the model.

Observer: Both females were confederates who observed and recorded data. Females sat in the area adjacent to the immediate critical area.

Victim: The victim was played by four different men of black & 35 white people [age 26 - 35 years.]

They were dressed in identical casual clothing.

Jacket, trousers, no tie.

On 38 out of 103 trials, the victim smelled of alcohol and carried out a bottle of alcohol wrapped in a brown bag. On the other hand, 65 trials, they appeared sober and carried a black cane.

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Model : They were white males aged between 24 - 29 and were dressed informally.

They raised the victim to the sitting position and stayed with him till next stop.

SCENE

Females observed passengers and recorded the race, gender, and location of each helper. The victim stood at the pole at the centre of the critical area. The model remained standing through out the trial. Each trial used the same route as it included a 7.5 - minute gap between two stations. At approximately 70 seconds, the victim staggered forward & collapsed. If he received no help, the model would help him at the next stop. When 'modelling' helping, the model helped the victim to a sitting position & stayed until the next stop.

1. Critical / early : the model stood in the critical area and waited 70 seconds to help the victim.

2. Critical / late : the model stood in critical area and waited 150 seconds to help the victim.

3. Adjacent / early : the model stood in adjacent area and waited 70 seconds to help the victim.

4. Adjacent / late : the model stood in adjacent area and waited 150s to help the victim.

5. No model condition : the model did not help the victim until after the trial was over and the train reached the next stop.

RESULTS

- The frequency of helping was much higher than previously reported in laboratory studies. The majority of helpers were males.
- 80% of victims received spontaneous help. 60% of victims received help from more than one person. Participants are more likely to help victims with a cane (62/65) trials than the drunk victim (19/38). Spontaneous helping was earlier for cane victims.
- Both black and white cane victims received equal help. In drunk conditions, same race helping behaviour was found. Black drunk victims received less help overall.
- Each model intervention at 70 seconds slightly received more helping behaviour than waiting till 150 seconds.
- The research does not support the diffusion of responsibility. In fact, 7 person groups responded faster than 3 person groups.
- In 20% of trials, people moved away from critical area during the incident. A high number of comments during the trials where help wasn't given was recorded. More comments were recorded during drunk victim trials.

CONCLUSION

- In a natural setting, many people would offer help to a stranger, even in a group situation.
- No diffusion of responsibility was found.
- Factors that may determine the decision to help:
 1. Type of victim
 2. Gender of victim

3. Similar race

4. The longer the emergency continues, the less likely it is for someone to help.

SP STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

→ It was a field experiment using independent variable groups design therefore, there was high ecological validity as participants' behaviour was natural. However, we cannot control extraneous variables that influence behaviour thus, lowering validity and reliability.

→ We cannot be sure if participants only took part once. They may suspect a set-up and show demand characteristics by helping more or less.

→ NYC subway sample is not generalizable to the upper class, rural class, other countries but, as the sample was large it is likely to be representative. The sample included different ethnicities thus, there is representativeness.

→ Quantitative measurements were objective as data by two observers could be cross-checked, thus it is reliable. Quantitative data such as remarks and behaviour of participants helped understand thoughts & behaviour.

Ethical Issues : participants did not give informed consent in taking part, plus they were not debriefed. Participants were deceived as they may have thought that the victim genuinely requires help.