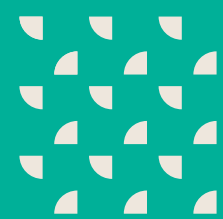


About the bystander effect



Imagine witnessing an emergency right in front of you - instinctively you would like to believe you would do something to help. However, the bystander effect suggests that may not always be the case.

A bystander, who is typically an observer or witness, has the potential to intervene when it's safe to do so. Ironically, in emergencies, the more bystanders there are, the less likely any of them will step in, whether it's against a bully, during an assault, or another crime.

The concept of the bystander effect emerged following the tragic murder of Kitty Genovese in New York City in 1964. Despite there being dozens of witnesses, none intervened or called the police while she was stabbed to death outside her apartment.

Researchers and psychologists attribute this occurrence to several factors:

- Diffusion of responsibility - more onlookers results in less individual responsibility.
- Fear of public judgement - the concern about being judged or losing face in front of others.
- Social influence - individuals gauge how to act by observing those around them.

A well-known study found that when just one person saw a stranger in need, 85% offered help. In contrast, when a group of six people witnessed the same scenario, only 31% provided assistance.

If we lack the necessary skills or experience to deal with a situation, we might hesitate to step in, fearing the possibility of making a mistake or looking foolish. Our behaviour and response is also influenced by the reactions of other bystanders; so if they're ignoring the circumstances, we're more likely to do the same.

In stressful or frightening situations, it's natural to experience a fight-flight-or-freeze response. Like Kitty Genovese's neighbours, many people hesitate to intervene or call for help due to fear, uncertainty, or the perception that someone else will step in. It's important to break away from this mindset and take some responsibility, without taking unnecessary risks, to improve community safety.

While very few of us will ever witness a murder, other threatening events can occur in public, the workplace, or at home. Being an active or ethical bystander means doing something that will positively impact the event and its outcome. You never know, one day the roles could reverse, and you might be relying on onlookers to intervene and help you out of a frightening situation.

Don't succumb to the bystander effect – share information with Crime Stoppers which can help police investigate a crime or suspicious behaviour. But remember, for police assistance or attendance, you must ring 131 444, or in emergencies dial 000.

References: *Psychology Today*
Simply Psychology

