*Sokoto Educational Review*
*Vol. 8, Vol. 1*

# THE SIZE OF ONLOOKERS AS A PREDICTOR OF ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOUR AMONG TERTIARY INSTITUTION STUDENTS IN OGUN STATE.

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**Abstract**

*There had been raging controversies on the effect of bystanders/onlookers on altruistic behaviour. While results show no significant effect of size of onlookers others show significant effect. This study, which focuses on altruistic behaviour of the Nigerian students is quite apposite.* One hundred and eighty tertiary institution students in Ogun State were used with the same number of male and female. The instrument used was Self- Report Altruism Scale(SRAS) which was adapted from Rushton Et. Al (1981) scale. The time taken for a subject to respond was also used. It was found that lone subject helped more than when in company of others. Also the less the number of onlookers the more the likelihood of helping.

## Introduction

In Africa (especially in Nigeria) no help is too small or big to be rendered to a beneficiary. It is usually believed that when you help a short man a tall man might reciprocate. This assertion sometimes rules out that a help giver will anticipate being paid back by the same person (i.e. the beneficiary). This culture of assisting others, especially those in need is being used by both print and electronic media to make clarion call on spirited individuals in the society to contribute generously to alleviate the plight of some individuals in the society.

Students are naturally responsive to the plight of their colleagues. They go out of their way to sharing money, cloths, food, lecture notes, ideas, assignments, and even assisting, at their own risk, in examination halls. In this way many students have put themselves at the risk of being expelled from school for giving a helping hand to colleagues. According to Alao (1990) etiquette (unwritten rules of behaviour among polite people) demands that apart from control of antisocial impulses "the concerns about the welfare and feeling for others are also involved". People are pro-social for the existence of the society.

Many definitions have been provided by several scholars (Roven and Rubin.1983; Boehn, 1996; Adekoya, 1999 etc) but the following definitions are quite appropriate to this study. Hayes (1993) in Hewstone et al (1996) sees

altruism as "an individual's voluntary effort benefiting a recipient, with no expectation of reward". Altruism is also referred to as an act of helping others at a cost to the participant but without expecting personal gain (Roven and Rubin, 1983). According to these scholars, altruism and cooperation share the same properties of involving costs to the participants but differ from one another in that altruism does not involve expecting any personal gain or gratification. Altruism is seen here, therefore, as a complex voluntary helping behaviour involving actions such as generosity, helping others, volunteering to carry out an act without thinking of any gratification to self.

The perception and interpretation of a situation as an emergency will instigate helping behaviour in an individual. The onlookers are the people present at the scene of an event or incident. The number or type of persons present may determine the kind of action that may be initiated by an altruistic person. It is widely observed that the more the number of bystanders the less the probability of giving or receiving help (Latane & Darley, 1968 in Hewstone, et al 1996). Several experiments were carried out by many scholars after the brutally murder of Kitty Genovese in New York.

Why do people fail to render help even when they have the capacity to do so? Certain factors must be responsible apart from the presence of others. Latane and Darley (1970) in Hewstone, et. al.( 1996) suggested complex model of factors that inhibit or tends to "bias the onlookers towards inaction". To react an individual must:

(i) Perceive that unusual thing is really happening.
(ii) Interpret the incident as an emergency that requires assistance or help.
(iii) See the situation as his personal responsibility to react, assist or help.
(iv) Accept his competence in taking the necessary or appropriate action i.e. assess his skills or knowledge in rendering help or assistance.
(v) Decide to carry out the action irrespective of possible social cost or physical danger.

For an individual to help, all these five elements must be in the affirmative otherwise if one is negative, the onlooker will not intervene. Not all situations are considered as emergences by people.

Onlookers are prompted to assist in an emergency even when there are many of them at the site of the incident (Shortland and Huston 1979). If the situation is ambiguous, pluralistic ignorance may occur i.e. when no one takes action other onlookers will take cue and assume a collective misinterpretation hence will not help ( Clark and Word.1974.)

There are some arguments against the onlooker's effect on altruism as put forward by Latane and Darley. The proponents are of the opinion that group

increases altruism than individual. However, (Darley, Teger and Lewis, 1973), opined that there is a vast difference between laboratory experiments and face-to-face proximity with the reality on the field. The inhibiting effect is attenuated when individual is in "direct face-to-face setting". Teger and Lewis (1973) argued that rather than others inaction, emotional response/startled reaction to an emergency inhibits an altruist in helping a victim. It will help the altruist redefine the situation as an emergency and hence offer help, one person's action prompts others taking altruistic action. To support this argument, Darley and Co (1973) carried out an experiment whereby subjects were physically exposed to a situation of distress, screaming and groaning of a workman after a heavy screen fell on him. They discovered that 80% of subjects in face-to-face group responded while only 20% responded in non-face-to-face group.

Clark and Word (1974) also argued that the "degree of ambiguity of the emergency situation" affect group intervention. They were of the opinion that the emergency situation used by Latane and Darley were relatively ambiguous hence predisposes the group to be passive. They investigated this using three levels of ambiguity and found out that whether a subject is alone or in group, individual renders assistance more of low than high ambiguity. Also subjects in group (made of two persons) responded more (100%) than alone subject (99) in a non-ambiguous situation. However,highly ambiguous situation. Those in group still offer help more (33%) than those alone (18%)

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of onlookers on altruistic behaviour of the Nigerian students with particular reference to Ogun State, see if the number of onlookers will initiate or inhibit helping (an altruistic act) one another on campus and find a standing point in the controversies on onlooker effect. It is therefore hypothesized that The size of the group of onlookers has no significant predictor of the likelihood of helping among students in tertiary institutions of Ogun State.

**Research design**

Post test-only, equivalent-group design was used in the study. This design was used because administering pretest to the subject was impossible. The shortcoming of this design was circumvented by randomly assigning subjects to groups. In actual fact, the subjects were not aware that they were taking part in a research.

**Population, and sampling Procedure**

Students in the six tertiary institutions n Ogun State were the target population for this study. Random sampling was used in determining which of the tertiary institutions that was used. The tertiary institutions that were picked are; - (i) Federal college of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta. (ii) Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU) Ago – Iwoye,

One hundred and eighty six students were sampled for the study comprising of ninety three male and ninety three female. The subjects were selected using stratified sampling technique. This is to include subjects walking or sitting alone, two or more subjects and both sexes. Subjects were selected in the natural setting i.e. subjects who were sitting or walking alone or in two or more. All those met in these situations were potential participants while some were assigned to participate others were not. The subject alone was assigned the alphabet X while the subjects in the company of one other subject was assigned Y and in company of more than one other subjects was assigned Z. These students were randomly assigned to single (when alone), two (when they paired), and more than two (when they are in group of three and more). They were exposed to both the treatment and filling of self-report scale on altruism (SRSA).

**Methodology**

Three people were employed to participate in the field study . These three worked hand in hand. They positioned themselves in a designated place and waited for the subject to emerge. If the subject came alone, one person walked to meet him or her, with a little distance from the subject, the person stumbled and dropped or scattered some packs of cards (telephone/smart cards) he/she was holding. If the subject assisted in picking the cards another request was made "kindly help me arrange the cards". The same person noted if he or she helped in picking and or arranging the cards or did not help at all. The second person recorded the time for reactance with a stopwatch; the third person administered the questionnaire marked with R (to subjects that responded) or N (to subjects that did not respond). The same procedure was repeated if the subjects were two or more. Only the second person recorded the time taking for the subject to assist. The employed persons moved to take their original position after the subjects had left.

There were three sets of these employed people each set consisted of three people and carried out the same functions .

**Instrumentation**

The main instrument of this study is Self-Report Altruism Scale (SRAS). The scale was designed by Rushton and Others (1981) and adapted with items 1 & 10 slightly modified in order to make them applicable to Nigerian settings. In Nigeria, elevators are not common hence the aspect was removed. This instrument measures "expected antecedents of altruistic behaviour" (Rushton and Others, 1981). SRAS is a twenty-item questionnaire asking respondents to react to the frequency of what they have done in the past such as "I have donated blood", "I have allowed someone to go ahead of me in a line up" (at Xerox machine in the super market) etc. The responses were measured on a five point Likert-Scoring pattern range from "never" to "very often". Never was assigned one (1) point while very often five (5) points.

The number of items in the original scale was increased from twenty to twenty-five by this researcher. The additional items were related to egoism. Its relevance to the present study was however determined by nine experts from neighbouring university. These experts rated each item on a nine-point scale. The highest (9) shows high relevance to altruism while the lowest (1) indicate none relevance. Items with total sum of 45 (i.e. 50%) and above were considered to be relevant and were selected while those below 45 were considered to be irrelevant and were not selected. Twenty of the items were finally selected the remaining items that were related to egoism were scored very low.

The original designer assessed the reliability of the instrument using split-half reliability test. To determine the reliability of the instrument for this study the researcher administered the instrument to fifty student teachers of a sister college of Education i.e. Lagos State college of Primary Education (LACOPED), Noforija near Epe. These students did not participate in the main study. After a month interval the instrument was re-administered to the same set of students. The test-re-test computation yielded a high correlation of 0.82.

**Analysis of Data**

The data collected from the field were analysed and discussed below. The data were tested at a significance level of 0.05. The statistical tools used include ANOVA, linear Regression, and Scheffe test.

**Ho**:- *The size of the group of onlookers will not be significant predictor of the likelihood of helping among students in tertiary institutions of Ogun State.*

Regression analysis was used to find the predictive nature of the size of group of bystanders on likelihood of helping.

**Table I:** Result of Regression of the effect of size of bystanders on likelihood of helping.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Multiple R<br>Multiple $R^2$<br>Adjusted $R^2$<br>Std Error of the Estimate | =<br>=<br>=<br>= | .167<br>.028<br>0.22<br>10.92440 | | | | |
| Source of variation | Sum of squares | df | Mean square | $F_c$ | p | Remark |
| Regression | 629.653 | 1 | 629.653 | 5.276 | .023[a] | S |
| Residual | 22078.347 | 185 | 119.342 | | | |
| Total | 22708.000 | 186 | | | | |

a. predictors: (Constant). SIZE

Table 1 is the regression analysis of the prediction of the size of onlookers on likelihood of helping. The adjusted $R^2$ is very small(i.i. .022) showing 2.2% of predicting helping situation. The size of onlooker therefore, is a weak predictor of helping. The calculated f- value is 5.276 which is higher than the critical value (3.89). The calculated alpha value (.023) is significant. Thus at 5% level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is upheld i.e. size of onlooker is a significant predictor of likelihood of helping.

**Table I1:** The result of regression of predictor of size of onlookers on likelihood of helping

| Variable | Unstandardised coefficients | Standardized coefficients | | t | p | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | Std Error | Beta | | | |
| Constant | 58.730 | 2.619 | | 22.423 | .000 | S |
| Size | -2.539 | 1.05 | -.167 | -2.297 | .023 | S |

From table II, we observed that the P-value for size of onlooker is 0.023 at $P < 0.05$ and the beta value is negative(-2.539) therefore, it is statistically significant. It is concluded that size is a significant predictor of likelihood of helping. The negative value of B (B = -2.539) informs that from this study, the more the number of bystanders, the less likelihood of help being forthcoming. The significant value of the constant means that other factors are inherent which are not identified here.

Since it has been established that the size of bystanders predicted the likelihood of helping, it is imperative therefore, to find if there was any difference among the sizes(i.e. subject alone, with another, and with more than two others). Scheffe test was used to find this difference.

**Table III:** Scheffe analysis of likelihood of helping among bystanders.

| Onlooker | N | Subset for alpha = .05 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 |
| Subject wish more them one other | 79 | 51.3544 | |
| Subject with one other | 77 | 53.1558 | 53.1558 |
| Subject alone | 31 | | 56.8065 |
| Significance | | .705 | .239 |

Table III is the Scheffe analysis of likelihood of helping among bystanders. Subset for alpha at 0.05 are computed for subject alone(56.8065), two subjects (53.1558) and more than two subjects (51.3544). The computed significance at $\alpha = 0.05$ are shown i.e. 0.705 and 0.239. This shows a diminishing value as the size of onlookers increases. Therefore, subject alone has a higher tendency to help and this higher likelihood of helping is significantly different from that of subject with more than one other (i.e. with two or more bystanders)

**Discussion**

*The size of the group of bystanders has no significant impact on the likelihood of helping among students in tertiary institutions of Ogun State.*

The null hypothesis above was rejected because it was statistically proved that the size of onlookers at the scene of an incident influenced the helping situation. This finding is in conformity with earlier studies carried out on the field (Wilson, 1980; Batson, 1991;Bernstein et al, 1994) and in the laboratory settings (Latune & Darley, 1968., Hewstone, 1996). From table II and III it is clear that the number of people at the scenes created difference reactance or response. That is, there exist significant difference in helping situation as the number of onlookers increased. It was apparent that the likelihood of helping by a lone student was higher than when two or more were present.

Human being, no matter the creed or race, are the same all over the world as for as altruism is concerned. Nigerians are not exception to altruism. As stated earlier, it was found that the size of on lookers affected helping situation just as this study has confirmed. The time lag between those studies and the present one

seemed not to matter, students, like those in the society, were not different in their attitude to issues. They (students) are the microcosm of the society. They try to help one another at the time of distress. A lone student helped more than when they were more than one because they usually portrait the spirit of comradeship or do things in the spirit of being their brother's keeper. This spirit existed when they were more than one, but their difference in action could be attributed to audience inhibition (each person do not want to be embarrassed by his/her action if he/she first help or that others might think of him / her as being two forward).

As suggest by Latane and Darley (1968) in Hewstone (1996)the passive behaviour of the onlookers in the group experiment might also be due to pluralistic ignorance and diffusion of responsibility. The time lag between the incident of falling and helping might have been used by the bystanders to study the reaction of other bystanders, hence the more the number of bystander the longer for the group to help. Each of the student felt less personal responsible. Most Nigerian students moved in company of one or two others especially female. These group that moved or walked together, are usually friends. Each of the group member might be looking towards his/her friends to first initiate the act of helping before he/she also comply. The implication of these is that none of the group members initiated the first movement and when they did the fallen experimenter might have stood up. Each person was given up to twenty seconds to react after which the person was adjudged not to help.

The major finding of this study is that it was statistically proved that the number of bystanders affected the responses as far as altruistic acts are concerned. When a student is alone, the rate of response is higher than when one or more other students are present. The more the number of bystanders (students), the longer it took for one of them to respond. Other factors not identified in this study also contributed to the likelihood of helping. Therefore, from this study, the less the number of bystanders the more the likelihood of helping.

**Conclusions**

Social influence is sometimes responsible for the diverse behaviour that are witnessed in our society. Norm is one of the attributed reasons for social influence (Bernstein, 1994). These norms are passed on from one generation to another through culture, peers, clergy, teachers and most importantly the parents. These social factors according to Roediger III and others (1984) sometimes "minimize the role of the individual's personality in a situation". It should be noted that not all people would respond similarly when placed in the same situation i.e. individual difference sets in, the difference might be as a result of motives(Batson, 1994) or benefit accrued(amortz,1998). The presence of others

around us (onlookers) will affect the way we think, act, feel even without being told to do anything (Goodwin, 1992., Hayes and Orrell, 1993). This study statistically established this assertion. The presence of others inhibited the likelihood of helping among students of tertiary institutions in Ogun state.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Since it was established that the number of bystanders affect negatively likelihood of helping, therefore, when institutions are seeking help from highly spirited individuals in the society it must be discussed on one on one basis especially at the first contact. This will facilitate quick decision-making. Other people's presence might inhibit positive response from the philanthropist.

When seeking volunteers for any event that is critically beneficial to all, it is recommended that individual volunteer should be consulted alone in writing or through other means. This will help in personal decision without undue influence of others. In donating to charity however, appeal is better made openly first before personal consultations are made. Efforts should be geared towards finding the inherent factors that was not found in this study in subsequent studies.

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