

An Assessment of Helping Behaviour of University of Ibadan Campus Resident Students

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INTRODUCTION

Man is a social as well as a psychological being. He strives to interact with others while depending on them and they on him. This is a social aspect of being. As a psychological being, man interacts with his environment with a view to using his sense organs and intellect to perceive or make meaning out of the environment, thereby tending to master it. Since helping others involve self evaluation of the helper's own situation as well as the situation or psycho-environmental dynamics of the person being helped (Sunmola, 1995), a discussion of helping behaviour will logically touch on man's social and psychological being.

In traditional African societies, help had, until the advent of Western civilization, been known to be something that was rendered lavishly by people to their neighbours and strangers alike. Even in urban centers, helping someone in dire need of help (such as need for accommodation, tender care) or in distress was not an uncommon thing a couple of years ago. A number of years ago, helping behaviour was encouraged because there were less crimes, less faking and less reprisals (negative consequences) for helping people compared to what obtains today e.g. cars being snatched from owners when a stranger is given a ride.

Following the increase in Western civilization, increase in number of urban centers and their attendant negative consequences, helping behaviour, especially in towns and cities, has generally been on the decline, Evhota (1992). This decline has also been felt in the hinterlands.

Apart from declining generally, helping behaviour has been speculated to have noticeably declined more among men than among women. This has been because people (e.g. Deros, 1989) have generally observed that women are much more humane, considerable and empathetic of people's suffering than men. Described by Lantane and Darley (1968) as a com-

plex event influenced by many variables, helping behaviour also goes by the name prosocial behaviour. According to Lantane and Darley (1968), while it is true that urban living can be dehumanizing, this does not explain bystander apathy or people's unwillingness to help others in distressful situations. Lantane and Darley (1968) are of the view that failure to help is related to the number of people present.

The authors have over the years established that the more expected helpers present, the lower the chances that help will be given (Lantane and Darley, 1981). Amidst a number of expected helpers, everyone thinks someone else would help. Personal responsibility for helping is spread so thin among members of such a group of supposed helpers that no one takes action. In general, Lantane and Darley assumed that bystanders are not apathetic or uncaring; they are inhibited by the presence of others.

According to the authors, there are four decision points individuals must pass through before giving help. These include (a) noticing what is happening (b) defining the event or situation as emergency (c) taking responsibility and (d) selecting a course of action. Laboratory experiments have shown that each step can be influenced by the presence of other people. Other influencing variables could be a person's sex, personality and educational level.

Relative higher status differences also exist societies. In African societies, as it is the case in other societies, people's status change along with the positions they occupy and the roles they play in the society. People with higher status are typically expected or thought to have more resources and consequently more likely to render help to help seekers than those at the lower echelon of the society. Such sayings as "big man, big trouble" and "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown" points to, among others things, the help rendering roles that are expected to be played by people of higher status. Whether or not a person's status is high or low could be viewed at the

backdrop of his/her educational level, economic standing as well as social or political standing.

In the university setting, undergraduate students are generally seen as being younger, less experienced and having less resources at their disposal than their postgraduate counterparts. This difference places limitations on the ability and willingness of undergraduate students to help their colleagues who are in distress.

In view of Eisenberg and Miller (1987, 1996) people have influence on others' definition of a situation as an emergency. Clues are searched for to help in the interpretation of an emergency. No one wants to over react or act like a fool if there was no emergency. In some real emergencies or distressful situations, people sometimes underestimate the need for action because each person attempts to appear calm. In short, until someone acts, no one acts.

According to Coon (1997), taking responsibility is perhaps the most crucial step in the helping sequence. In this case, groups limit helping by causing a diffusion of responsibility. In Coon's words, diffusion of responsibility is the spreading of responsibility to act among several people. This reduces the likelihood that help will be given to a person in need. Sunmola (1995) is of the view that helping behaviour is influenced by culture among other variables.

Many studies suggest that when we see a person in trouble it tends to cause heightened arousal (Davido, 1984). This aroused, keyed-up feeling can motivate us to give aid, but only if the rewards of helping outweigh the costs. Higher costs (such as great effort, personal risk, or possible embarrassment) almost always decrease helping (Foss, 1986). In addition to general arousal, potential helpers may also feel empathic arousal. This means that they empathize with the person in need or feel some of the person's pain, fear, or anguish. Helping is much more likely when we are able to take the perspective of another person and feel sympathetic for their plight (Eisenberg, 1991).

Empathetic arousal is especially likely to motivate helping when the person in need seems to be similar to ourselves (Eisenberg and Miller, 1987). In fact, a feeling of connection to the victim or help seeker may be one of the most important factors in helping. This, perhaps, is why be-

ing in good mood, according to Eisenberg and Miller (1987) also increases helping. When we are feeling successful, happy or fortunate, we may feel more connected to others (Davido, 1984). Batson (1990) sums up helping behaviour disposition by saying that we are most likely to help someone in need when we feel for that person and experience emotions such as empathy, sympathy and compassion.

In an experiment to test the assertion that people who see others helping are more likely to offer help themselves, Pyran and Test (1967) found that motorists were more likely to stop to help a woman fix a tyre when they had just passed another woman being helped by someone. Also, persons who give help in one situation tend to perceive themselves as helpful people. This change in self-image encourages them to help in other situations. Also, norms of fairness encourage us to help others who have helped us (Davido, 1984). For all these reasons, helping others not only assists them directly, it encourages others to help too.

Originally, Eysenck's factor analytical research fielded evidence for two basic dimensions that could subsume all other traits: extraversion – introversion and neuroticism. Because the dimensions are independent of one another, people who score on the extraversion end of the first dimension can score either high or low on the second dimension. A typical extravert, according to Eysenck, is sociable, likes parties, has many friends, needs to have people to talk to, and does not like reading or studying by himself. An introvert is "a quiet, retiring sort of person, introspective, fond of books rather than people, he is reserved and distant except to intimate friends". Eysenck argues that extraverts and introverts differ not only in terms of behaviour but also in their physiological make-up.

As to whether people could be permanently extraverted or introverted, Eysenck (1990) found that inherited difference in physiology remains fairly constant throughout one's life and eventually developed into the adult behaviour styles of extraversion or introversion. Because of their inherited physiological differences, it is unlikely an introvert will come to enjoy social interactions to the same degree as someone born with a relatively low sensitivity to arousal or that an

extravert will ever find a life of quiet and solitude very appealing.

Based on the above reviews, Coon (1997) suggests that if people should find themselves in need of help during an emergency, they should make themselves noticeable for such a desired help to be received.

As a complex units of the society, universities are expected to experience to a large extent various behavioural or social changes that take place in the larger society they operate in. It is on this basis that one can explain the various changing interactional and behavioural processes that take place in the university system. Very much like their counterparts in the larger society, members of the university community depend on one another in so many areas including research, social interaction, information dissemination, learning and accommodation (especially in the case of students).

In Nigeria, shortage of campus residential accommodation for students, among other problems, has become very pronounced following the yearly increase in student population. This shortage of hostel accommodation, worsened by poor planning for new infrastructure, has over the years caused inconveniences to thousands of students who do not have other alternatives.

At the University of Ibadan, as it is the case with other Nigerian Universities and higher institutions, it has become a practice for officially accommodated students to bring in non-accommodated student colleagues to put up with them in their various halls of residence. A number of other students in fact buy bed spaces from their officially allocated colleagues at exorbitant prices. They too sometimes allow stranded friends to put up with them. This practice of non-accommodated student putting up with officially accommodated ones in halls of residence is popularly called "*squatting*". It leads to serious overcrowding in the halls.

It has been observed that more often than not, the willingness of students to help with accommodation depends on their prior knowledge of the people that seek for their help. As such it is more unlikely for a student to accommodate a stranger than it is for him or her to accommodate his/her friend, fellow tribes man/woman or church members.

The changing trend in helping behaviour in Nigeria might not be far-fetched. Firstly, there could have been a kind of breakdown in our moral and legal value systems such that it has become difficult to render help lavishly. Secondly, Nigerians, perhaps, now place more emphasis on self-comfort, economic well being, security and privacy than they have done before. Thirdly, it appears the legal framework itself directly or indirectly discourages helping people. For example, by merely helping someone in Nigeria (such as an accident victim), people have had to go through serious police interrogations and court cases. For that reason, people now tend to look at the repercussions or consequences of helping, thereby making up their minds to refuse help and avoid likely trouble.

In the Nigerian University setting also, students are in a way discouraged to help others. Help in things like accommodation and related matters is probably denied people due to such reasons as unwillingness to be inconvenienced, implicated in cult and other nefarious activities as well as desire to safeguard possible clashes that might arise from differences in religion, culture and use of personal space.

Bearing in mind the above statement and other various differences that are noticed in helping behaviour of individuals, it was hypothesized that:

1. Female students would more significantly express willingness to share their hostel accommodation with their stranded female student colleagues than male students would with their male student colleagues.
2. Extroverts would more significantly be willing to share their hostel accommodation with their stranded student colleagues than introverts would with their student colleagues.
3. Undergraduate students would more significantly express willingness to share their hostel accommodation with their stranded colleagues than postgraduate students would with their stranded student colleagues.

METHOD

Design: The design of this study was ex post facto which did not involve manipulation of any variables.

Subjects: Subjects were 88 undergraduate and postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, with a mean age of 24.1 years and a standard deviation of 3.2. The subjects (44 males and 44 females) were randomly drawn from Tedder, Queen's, Awolowo (postgraduate and undergraduate wings), and Balewa halls of the University. Selection was semi-random and depended on the students who went into the affected halls within the hours of study and were willing to give the researchers attention.

INSTRUMENTS

Introversion-extroversion Scale

The introversion-extroversion part of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) was used to determine whether subjects were extroverts or introverts. The used part of the EPQ contained 17 items with the overall reliability coefficient of the entire EPQ being 0.72.

Helping Behaviour Measuring Scale

This consisted of a 15-item questionnaire developed and validated by the researchers. A subject's response to each of the 15 questionnaire items involved choosing one option from a range of five alternative responses, namely, Very surely, Surely, Undecided, Very Unsurely, and Never. The five alternative responses were scored 5-1 respectively. A subject's aggregate score on the 15 items represented his/her score on helping behaviour. The reliability coefficient of the helping behaviour scale, which was earlier pretested using a sample of 20 randomly selected resident undergraduate and postgraduate students of the University of Ibadan, was 0.67.

Procedure

The study took place at the entrances of the respective halls of residence indicated above. The time for the study was between the hours of 7.00 – 10.00 p.m. on separate evenings. A day or evening was dedicated for a hall at a time. The researchers, with their assistant went to the hall, obtained permission to carry out the study and then stood by the hall entrance to randomly and

separately get to talk to members of the hall who were either coming in or going out. The typical format of the researchers' conversation with each of the subjects was:

"Good evening sir/madam, my name is Moses Ebodaghe

(Fictitious) and my colleague is Kemi (fictitious name

of a female research assistant). We are here on behalf

of Give-Care, a U.I. based non-religious, non-political

welfare organization. As you might have been aware,

many of our new students just arriving for registration

are having serious problems with accommodation.

Their plight has reached a worrisome proportion and

hence has attracted the attention of our organization.

Just this evening, Give-Care members assembled

scores of the fresh unaccommodated students with

the hope of talking to well meaning accommodated

stale students like you for assistance. Give-Care would be

glad if you would agree to accommodate just one of the

person of your gender for a day or two pending the time a

more concrete accommodation arrangement would be

made for them. To enable us know your readiness or

feelings about this request, please help us respond to

the statements on this paper by choosing one option in each

item which corresponds with your feelings/view".

The decision to give out the questionnaire to a subject to complete was dependent on the subject's willingness to listen to and do as the researchers requested during their briefing. Subjects who did not indicate interest were politely allowed to take their leave.

RESULTS

As shown in table 1 below, there was a significant difference in the helping behaviour of male and female students ($t = 4.2$, $p < .05$). The mean comparison in the same table shows that females were significantly more willing to help than males.

Table 1: Summary of Independent T-test mean comparisons of Helping Behaviour of Male and Female Subjects

Variables	N	SD	X	t	df	P
Males	44	3.0	24.0	4.2	86	< .05
Females	44	3.4	24.2			

As shown in table 2 below, there was a significant difference in the helping behaviour of extrovert and introverts ($t = 5.01$, $p < .05$). The mean comparison in the same table shows that extroverts were significantly more willing to help than introverts.

Table 2: Summary of Independent T-test mean comparisons Between Extroverts and Introverts' Helping Behaviour

Variables	N	SD	X	t	df	P
Introverts	39	3.1	23.2	5.01	86	< .05
Extroverts	49	3.3	25.0			

As depicted in table 3 below, there was no significant difference in the willingness of undergraduate and postgraduate students to assist stranded colleagues with accommodation.

Table 3: Summary of Independent T-test mean comparisons Between Undergraduate and Postgraduates' Helping Behaviour

Variables	N	SD	X	t	df	P
Undergraduates	58	3.4	28.1	1.90	86	ns
Postgraduates	30	3.0	20.1			

DISCUSSION

The significant difference in helping behaviour of males and females as shown in table 1 is not unfounded. Females are known to generally have a more encouraging helping behaviour than males. Deros (1989) noticed a decline in helping behaviour of Americans. But this was more noticed among men than among women. Women have been shown by researches to be

much more humane, considerate and empathetic of people's sufferings than men. This is because women, especially in the African culture have been socialized to be soft, caring, humane and empathetic. Also, their roles as mothers sustain the above attributes in them. Furthermore, women in Africa are found less in "tough" and "hardening" areas like the Military and Paramilitary occupation or profession.

The significant difference in the helping behaviour of extroverts and introverts as shown in table 2 is also well founded. Extroverts are known to be more sociable, impulsive, active, lively, and excitable, hence their higher tendency to give help than introverts who have opposite attributes, namely, less sociable, less impulsive, withdrawn to themselves and less lively. This finding tallies with Lantane and Darley's (1968) proposition that helping behaviour is influenced by a number of variables, which include personality.

The non-significant difference in the helping behaviour of undergraduate and postgraduate students as shown in the t-value in table 3 is a pointer to the fact that level of education is not so much a significant factor to account for the helping behaviour of Nigerians. Given their supposedly better and longer exposure, postgraduate students were expected to differ significantly from undergraduates in their helping behaviour. This is because they were thought to have themselves experienced similar situations and hence better placed to appreciate the plight of those with accommodation problems. Depending on their personalities, however it was expected that some of the postgraduate students would be either more willing to help or cherish their privacy than their undergraduate counterparts. This later line of thought was hinged on the assumption that postgraduate students are busier, more matured and with slightly different value system.

Given the above findings and the general seeming decline in the helping behaviour among Nigerians, there is the need for behavioural scientists to come out with attitudinal and behavioural changing programmes that can improve the situation for the better. As part of measures to facilitate these suggested positive changes, governments and concerned individuals and groups need to overhaul the legal and

cultural structures which impede helping behaviour. This has to do with, among others, the legal and administrative operating frameworks for the police and the judiciary. With particular emphasis on accommodation helping behaviour, people should be educated on the appreciation and use of personal space.

Improving helping behaviour also has a lot to do with a critical re-appraisal of our religious, cultural and stereotypic values. It's a fact that quite a number of people are denied help just because of expected helpers' firm adherence to religious, cultural and stereotypic values. If and when these barriers are removed through mass education and improved interaction processes, more people would be willing to render help if and when the need arises.

In conclusion, help seekers need to go through the four action stages suggested by Lantane and Darley (1968) when they are in need of help. These include (a) getting themselves noticed, (b) defining their situation as an emergency, (c) enabling their expected helpers to take responsibility and (d) making sure they (expected help seekers) select a favourable course of action.

KEY WORDS Helping Behaviour among University Campus Residents.

ABSTRACT This study was an ex post facto research. It surveyed the helping behaviour of 88 undergraduate and postgraduate students (44 males and 44 females) of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. subjects had a mean age of 24.1 years and a standard deviation of 3.2 and were residents of postgraduate and undergraduate halls of the Uni-

versity of Ibadan. The instruments used for the study included the introversion-extroversion part of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) and a purposefully designed 16-item, 5-1 rated Helping Behaviour Measuring Scale. Using the t-test statistic to test three hypotheses, it was found that (1) there was a significant difference in the helping behaviour of female and male students ($t = 4.2, p < .05$), (2) there was a significant difference in the helping behaviour of extroverts and introverts ($t = 5.01, p < .05$), and (3) there was no significant difference in the helping behaviour of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Discussion of findings was made with regard to the psychological, cultural, legal and administrative barriers that stand in the way of people's willingness to help others in distress. Recommendations on ways of getting expected helpers attention were also made.

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