

The Lecture Contains:

- ☰ Critiquing the theories of social influence
- ☰ After we conform: Do we stick to the norms or resist it?
- ☰ Outcomes of the experiment
- ☰ Interpretation of outcomes of the experiment
- ☰ Resisting effects of destructive obedience

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Understanding prosocial behaviour

- Behaviour that is beneficial to others but are of no obvious benefits to the person carrying it out is known as the prosocial behaviour. We have observed and read about such acts of help without any obvious benefit to oneself. However, we have also noticed that not all the people show the readiness to provide help when the need arises. We will look at the explanations of prosocial behaviour or a lack of it in the next four lectures.
- In this lecture, we will try to understand whether and how the presence of others people or 'bystanders' deters people from helping the needy person.



The classical experiment on 'bystander effect'

- Darley and Latane (1968) made an attempt to understand whether number of other people present in a setting (bystanders) has an impact of help provided to the person. They wanted to understand what proportion of people actually provide help and how much delay takes place before help is provided when the number of bystanders increases. In their experiment, they created a situation where a person developed seizures and needed help. The participants were made aware of the number of people available there (besides the participant himself/herself) as potential helpers. Figure 6.1 given below provides the outcomes the experiment.
- It is clear from Figure 6.1 that with an increase in the number of bystanders, there is decrease in the number of people coming forward to help the needy person. Also, there is an increase in the time-lag before the help is provided.

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Figure 6.1: Outcomes the experiment

	Number of bystanders		
	<i>One</i>	<i>Two</i>	<i>Five</i>
<i>Percentage of helpers</i>	85	62	31
<i>Time elapsed before help (seconds)</i>	52	93	166

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Explaining the prosocial action

- It may appear that the reasons for not helping the needy by the bystanders is because of 'diffusion of responsibility'. This, indeed was the lay explanation of the bystander effect until, John Darley and Bibb Latane researched the reasons for people's failure to help. Darley and Latane (1970) gave the Five Choice Model of bystander effect. The model is centred on five questions that provide some insight into the bystander effect and prosocial action :
1. Does the bystander attend to the situation?
 2. Is the situation interpreted as an emergency?
 3. Does the bystander assume the responsibility for taking action?
 4. Does the bystander have the internal resources to provide help?
 5. Does the bystander decide to engage in helping behaviour?

Does the bystander attend to the situation?

- Initially, it is important that the bystander pays attention to what is happening in his/her surroundings. In reality, many a time a person, in general, is preoccupied with the job one may be doing. Unless, the person pays attention to the incident that requires intervention or help, he/she may not be in a position to evaluate whether that is an emergency or a non-emergency situation.

Is the situation interpreted as an emergency ?

- Correctly interpreting the situation as an emergency or not is hampered by two processes :
 - **Avoiding looking foolish** : One wants to avoid being taken as a person who just over-reacted to the situation. One fears if one incorrectly judges the situation as an emergency, then it might be an embarrassing situation for him/her.
 - **Pluralistic ignorance** : It is a group process during the time of a potential emergency when people rely on others' interpretation of the situation rather than one's own when everyone there is not sure about what to make out of the situation



Does the bystander assume the responsibility for taking action?

- Unless a person feels that it is his/her personal responsibility to help the needy, help may be denied or delayed. People who do not feel a personal responsibility to provide help may think that it is the responsibility of a person either in the role of leadership or professional helpers (doctor, fire-fighters etc.) to provide the help.

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Does the bystander have the internal resources to provide help?

- After the person assume the responsibility to help the needy, the question of having the resources or skills to help becomes an important one. Cramer et al. (1988), in their study of bystander effect, noted at an accident site that nurses rather than the other non-skilled bystanders offered help to the needy person.

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Does the bystander decide to engage in helping behaviour?

- Even if the person assumes the responsibility to provide help and has the resources for that, it the fear of negative consequences (such as interrogation by police in case of an accident or missing some personal work) that may deter a person to provide help. If one is able to overcome these fears, then a prosocial action may follow and the needy may be provided help.

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