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Roles of Perceived Locus of Causality, Social Distance and Gender on Willingness to Volunteer in Nigeria Local Community

Okafor, Chiedozie Okechukwu

Department of Psychology

Faculty of Management and Social Sciences

Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike

Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Phone: +2348063417550

E-mails: calldozie@yahoo.co.uk, chiedozie.okafor@fuani.edu.ng

Njemanze, Vivian Chizoma

Department of Sociology

Faculty of Management and Social Sciences

Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike

Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Onyeneje, Edwin C.

Department of Psychology

Enugu State University of Science and Technology

Enugu State, Nigeria

Abstract

The present study investigated potential enhancement factors in relation to volunteerism. Specifically, we examined how perceived locus of causality, social distance and gender may influence willingness to volunteer help for victims of road accident. The study was based on a controlled experiment among students of a university (N = 80). Hypotheses were tested simultaneously in a univariate analysis which showed non-significant influence of perceived locus of causality (H1, $p > .05$); significant influence of social distance (H2, $p < .05$); non-significant influence of gender (H3, $p > .05$); significant interaction of perceived locus of causality and gender ($p < .01$), and significant interaction of perceived locus of causality, social distance and gender on willingness to volunteer (H4, $p < .01$). That is, people were

more willing to help when those in need are related to them. The present study contributes to theory within this research field which explain African disposition by showing that kinship and familiarity are significant predictors of willingness to provide help for victims of disaster. However, the researchers encourage all Nigerians to look beyond family ties and affiliations in providing help to people in need.

Key Words: Volunteerism; Social distance; Perceived locus of causality; Gender; Nigeria; Local culture

Introduction

Volunteers generally seem able to identify with others and to see themselves and those whom they help as part of a common social condition. Such feelings of responsibility and empathy are strongest among members of the individuals' immediate community or group with whom they share some key characteristics, such as ethnicity, religion, or nationality. However, the theory of motivational attribution (Weiner, 1985) suggests that when people are aware that the victim of a misfortune is instrumental in his/her misfortune, they tend to withdraw their help. There are empirical studies supporting this theory. For example, Jeong (2007) investigated effects of gene-based explanations of obesity and behaviour-based explanations on willingness to help obese people and suggests that the lowest level of perceived control and responsibility judgment over obesity are likely to be found when genetic explanations are offered. Thus, as predicted, participants were more willing to help obese people whose conditions were "genetic" compared with those whose conditions were "behavioural" (see also Mullen & Skitka, 2009). Mantler, Shellenberg and Page (2003) found that blame was the only attribution variable that made unique and consistent contributions to explaining behavioural intentions and emotions. Thus, whether the actor was responsible or not and whether there was perceived controllability or not, if the actor was not found blame-worthy, observers are more likely to help. The result of the research supports the decision-stage models of attribution (Heider, 1958; Shever, 1985; Weiner, 1995).

Studies on gender differences found that men and women differ in the manner in which they render help (e.g. Anderson, 1993; Harris, 1992; Belansky & Boggiano, 1994; Fritzgerald, 2009). Anderson (1993) found that women were more nurturant in their helping disposition while men were more heroic and adventurous. This is similar to Belansky and Boggiano (1994); Fritzgerald (2009) who found that while women prefer to help more in non-emergency situations, men help more in emergency/violent situations. However, none of these studies examined attribution of causality as a critical factor in willingness to volunteer. In situations where volunteers do not know who they help and the misfortune in question, attribution of causality may not be considered a factor in helping. For organisations that target specific misfortunes, attribution of causality may be a critical factor in joining the organisation. In Nigeria's local communities where volunteering usually involves kin and neighbour concerns (Okafor, 2015); where people have little, or no freedom, in choosing where to volunteer, and where volunteers usually know in advance who they should help and the kind of misfortune in question, to what extent would an individual's volunteer efforts be felt, considering attributions of causality? The present researchers believe that one way to develop a broader and more integrative understanding of volunteerism might be to focus more attention on the "rational- emotive" causes of volunteer behaviours. The personal tendencies, motives, cost-reward calculations, group solidarity and responsiveness to situational demands that have been demonstrated to be critical to volunteer responding may not tell the whole "story". Therefore, work on implicit cognitive processes, such as perceived locus of causality and social distance awareness, which immediately precede social behaviours might be useful

for developing a more comprehensive understanding of when and why people do or do not volunteer. By jointly examining perceived locus of causality social distance and gender in volunteering, the present study was conducted to fill this gap.

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of perceived locus of causality, social distance and gender on willingness to volunteer help for a victim of misfortune. The objectives of the study were to: (i) investigate whether perceived locus of cause would influence the willingness of a potential help-giver volunteer help for a road accident victim; (ii) ascertain if the amount of social distance between a victim of misfortune and potential help-givers would affect the help-givers' willingness to volunteer help for the victim, (iii) examine whether gender would affect one's willingness to volunteer help for others, and (iv) ascertain if perceived locus of causality, social distance and gender would jointly affect a person's willingness to volunteer help for a victim of misfortune.

Methodology

Participants

Eighty (80) undergraduates (40 females and 40 males) (18 – 26 years, $M = 21.64$, $SD = 2.14$) selected by simple random sampling from the first-year students of Psychology, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu, South-Eastern Nigeria. The sample size of 80 was adopted for effective control of the research participants. The participants were met in their classroom on a lecture day, and recruited from the entire class of First-year students, nine (9) days before the experiment.

Stimulus Materials

Eighty (80) pieces of Volunteer Activity Option Sheets (A4); 40 pink-coloured cardboard cards and 40 blue-coloured cardboard cards; 4 black water-proof bag (1x2 feet); four near-by classrooms, a time piece and a plastic basket, and imaginary victims of road accident.

The decision to use imaginary victims of car accident was made based on Lynch (1990) who measured emergency and non-emergency helping using imaginary campus situations of the lecture room and party, respectively, by asking participants to "imagine"; Salminen and Glad (1992) who suggested that knowledge of the gender of the person being helped (the victim) has an impact on differences in helping behaviour; Henderson, Huang and Chang (2011) who measured prosocial behaviour by asking participants to "imagine" the occurrences of disasters in and outside the United States. Likewise, the decision to state Volunteer Activity Options on a Sheet of paper was based on Henderson, et al., (2011) who manipulated participants' experimental conditions by stating imaginary situations on sheets of paper, and also measured prosocial behaviour by asking participants, on sheets of paper, "how common", or not, it will be for people living in the US to "pray for the mining victims", "donate money to help the fire victims", and "donate cloths and food to help the earthquake victims".

Procedure

On the day of experiment, 114 students volunteered to participate. In drawing the sample for the study, the volunteered students were, first, partitioned into males and females, and a simple random sampling, using the "Lucky dip" technique, was employed to identify 40 participants from each pool of the partitions. Thus, small pieces of papers written, "participate" and "stand aside" were wrapped for the prospective participants to pick. Only, those students who picked "participate" were included in the study sample. Twenty (20) males and 20 females were respectively assigned to each of the two (2) experimental conditions, A and B using the lucky dip technique by picking "A" or "B". Participants in

group A were taken to a separate class room while participants in group B went to a different (but nearby) classroom (2 Research Assistants stayed in each of the class rooms).

In group A, female participants were given pink-coloured cards, numbered 1 to 20 (each participant with a separate number), while the male participants were given blue-coloured cards numbered 21 to 40 (each participant with a separated number). Similarly, in group B, female participants were given pink-coloured cards, numbered 41 to 60 (each participant with a separate number), while the male participants were given blue-coloured cards numbered 61 to 80. Participants’ names were called, and their numbers matched with their names on the list. This was intended to create a sense of responsibility where individual contributions are identifiable in order to avoid social loafing.

Thereafter, participants in group A were re-assigned into two groups using the “lucky dip” technique. For example, in group A, participants were re-assigned into “A1” (10 males and 10 females) and A2 (10 males and 10 females) by picking “A1”. Thus, a basket of 20 rapped pieces of papers, with only 10 “A1’s was presented, first to females, and later another basket of the same content was presented to males. Those who did not pick “A1” were labeled “A2”. Likewise, in group B, participants were re-assigned into “B1” and “B2” using the same technique. Thereafter, the participants in A1 moved into classroom 1; B1, into classroom 2; A2 moved into classroom 3, and B2, into classroom 4. Each of the four research assistants manned each of the classrooms, while the experimenter flowed.

The participants were given the Volunteer Activity Option Sheets in the different classrooms (see Appendix B). Group A1 were told that the victim was an ESUT student who was drunk and driving; Group A2 were told that the victim was a LASU student who was drunk and driving; Group B1 were told that the victim was an ESUT student who was knocked down by a carless driver; Group B2 were told that the victim was a LASU student who was knocked down by a careless driver. They were given 20 minutes to respond. At the end of the 20 minutes, the participants were asked to wrap their papers, and were directed in such a way that females in group A1 and B1 drop their papers in “Female bag 1”, females in group A2 and B2, in “Female bag 2”. The same also held for males: males in A1 and B1 dropped their papers in “Male bag 1”, males in A2 and B2, in “Male bag 2”. At the end of the experiment, the participants where gathered again and debriefed. Each participant received a sixty-leaf white exercise book and a ball-point pen as incentive for participating in the study. In scoring the participants’ Volunteer intentions, a single activity option represents a single score. For example, accepting to carry out Activity number 1 represents one mark, Activities 1 and 2 represent two marks, and accepting the whole Volunteer Activity Options represents 10 marks. No response attracts a score of zero.

Design and Statistics

The 2x2x2 factorial design was employed in this study. Three-way analysis of variance (3-way ANOVA) statistic was used to analyse the data.

Results

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of perceived locus of causality on willingness to volunteer

Perceived locus of causality	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
Internal attribution	4.85	1.56	40
External attribution	5.15	2.05	40

Table 1 above presents scores of participants on willingness to volunteer help for a car crash victim in relation to perceived locus of causality of the crash. The table shows that participants who made internal attribution of causality obtained a lower total mean of 4.85 (SD = 1.56) on willingness to volunteer when compared with participants who made external attribution of causality, and obtained a higher total mean of 5.15 (SD = 2.05) on willingness to volunteer.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of social distance on willingness to volunteer

Social distance	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
Socially close	5.36	1.35	40
Socially distant	4.63	2.13	40

Table 2 presents scores of participants on willingness to volunteer help for a car crash victim in relation to social distance between the victims (help-recipients) and the participants (help-givers). The table shows that participants who were socially close to the victim obtained a higher total mean of 5.38 (SD = 1.35) on willingness to volunteer when compared with those who were socially distant, and obtained a lower total mean of 4.63 (SD = 2.13) on willingness to volunteer.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of gender on willingness to volunteer

Gender	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
Males	4.75	1.72	40
Females	5.25	1.89	40

Table 3 presents scores of participants on willingness to volunteer help for a car crash victim in relation to the gender of the participants. The table shows that males obtained a lower total mean of 4.75 (SD = 1.72) on willingness to volunteer when compared with females who obtained a higher total mean of 5.25 (SD = 1.89) on willingness to volunteer.

Table 4: ANOVA summary of perceived locus of causality, social distance and gender on willingness to volunteer

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Perceived locus of causality	1.80	1	1.80	.70#	.41
Social distance	11.25	1	11.25	4.34*	.04
Gender	5.00	1	5.00	1.93#	.17
Perceived locus of cause x Social distance	.45	1	.45	.17#	.68
Perceived locus of cause x Gender	24.20	1	24.20	9.33**	.00
Social distance x Gender	8.45	1	8.45	3.26#	.08
Perceived locus of cause x Social distance x Gender	22.05	1	22.05	8.50**	.01
Total	260.00	79			

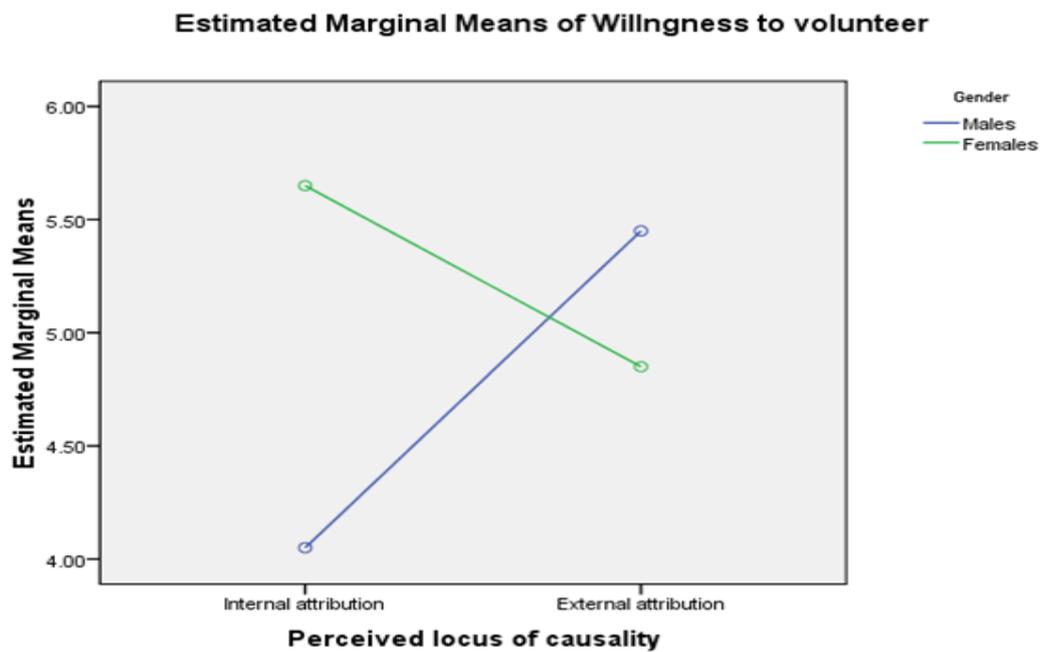
Keys: * = p<.05, ** = p<.01, # = Non-significant

This table presents summary of results of the analysis. Thus, it shows whether the experimental treatments were significant or not as indicated by the F-ratios of the independent variables.

The results of ANOVA presented in table 4 above shows a non-significant main effect of perceived locus of causality on willingness to volunteer, $p > .05$. This indicates a non-significant difference between participants who perceived the victim as the cause of the crash (internal attribution) and participants who perceived the crash as beyond the victim's control (external attribution), on willingness to volunteer. The results show a significant main effect of social distance on willingness to volunteer, $F(1,72) = 4.34, p < .05$. This indicates a significant difference between participants who were studying in the same university as the victim (socially close) and those studying in another university (socially distant), on willingness to volunteer. Thus, hypothesis 2 was accepted. The results also show a non-significant main effect of gender on willingness to volunteer ($p > .05$). This indicates a non-significant difference between males and females on willingness to volunteer.

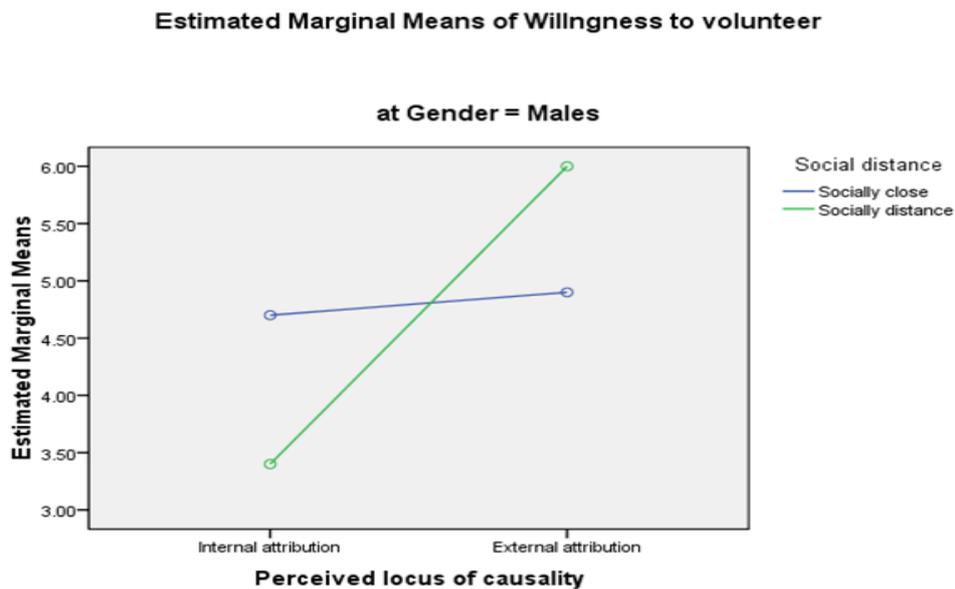
In addition, the results indicate a significant interaction of perceived locus of causality and gender on willingness to volunteer $F(1,72) = 9.33, p < .01$, and significant interactions of perceived locus of causality, social distance and gender on willingness to volunteer, $F(1, 72) = 8.49, p < .01$.

Fig. 1: Graph showing interaction of perceived locus of causality and gender on willingness to volunteer



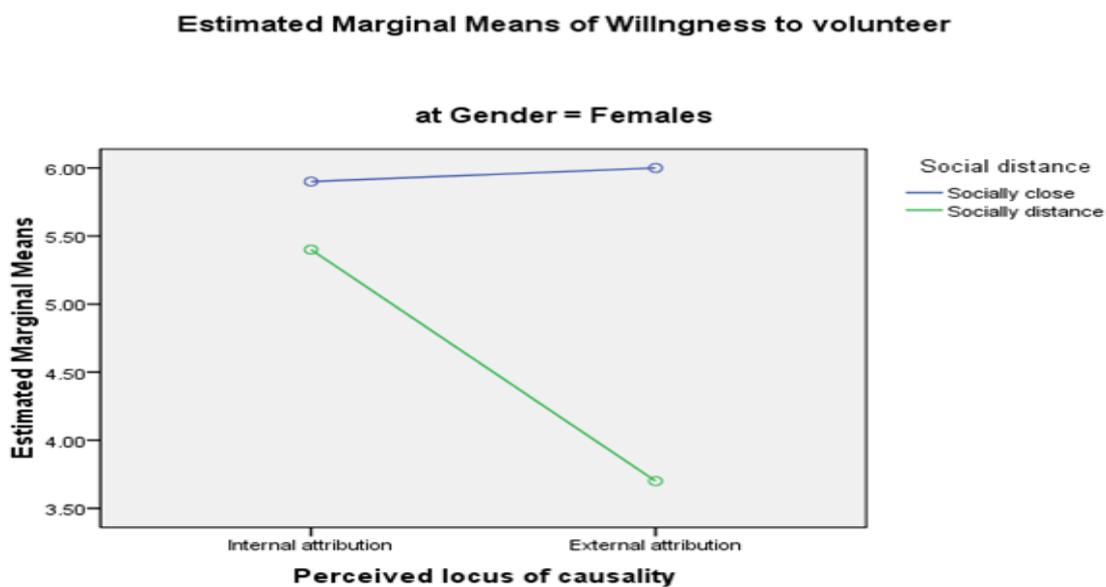
As shown in fig. 1 above, when total gender means were considered under perceived locus of cause, females who made internal attribution were more willing to volunteer ($M = 5.65$) when compared with females who made external attribution ($M=4.85, SD=2.28$). Under this perceived locus of causality, males who made external attribution ($M=5.45$) were more willing to volunteer when compared with males who made internal attribution ($M = 4.05$).

Fig. 2: Graph showing interaction of perceived locus of causality, social distance and gender (males) on willingness to volunteer



As shown in Fig. 2 above, socially distant males who made external attribution were more willing to volunteer ($M = 6.00$) when compared with socially distant males who made internal attribution ($M = 3.40$). Socially close males who made external attribution ($M = 4.90$) were more willing to volunteer compared with socially close males who made internal attribution (4.70).

Fig. 3: Graph showing interaction of perceived locus of causality, social distance and gender (females) on willingness to volunteer



As shown in Fig. 3 (see Appendix D), socially distant females who made external attribution were less willing to volunteer ($M = 3.70$) when compared with socially distant females who

made internal attribution ($M = 5.40$). Socially close female who made external attribution were more willing to volunteer ($M = 6.00$) when compared with socially close females who made internal attribution ($M = 5.90$).

Discussion

The non-significant main effect of perceived locus of causality found in the study, however, is attributable to the seemingly recent improvement in the moral behaviour of the students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Nigeria. The general public is not left behind: At this critical period of life, championed by violence and loss of human dignity, and which warranted the heightened enlightenment on the “signs of end-time”, people seem to be searching for opportunities to reconcile with nature for fear of “condemnation”. Therefore, it may not be surprising that people will help any victim irrespective of the cause of the misfortune. Moreover, the learned moral obligation enshrined in the Nigerian local cultures, which stresses brotherliness and which does not give much opportunity to choose where to volunteer help may be a factor in over-looking attribution of causality when help is needed.

The significant main effect of social distance found in this study is attributable to the culture of collectivism enshrined in African tradition. Nigeria is not left out. Starting with the volunteer teams that are rooted in local cultures (example, the Age Grade in the South-East) (Okafor, 2015), Nigerians seem to hardly demonstrate charity beyond their traditional regions. This seems to have informed the idea of coming home whenever there is need to execute humanitarian community projects. No wonder Nigerians in Diaspora come home to donate infrastructures and health facilities even when such facilities are needed by the countries of their residence. It seems very rare, to see infrastructure erected by a person of a particular town for people of another town, unless related by business, blood or marriage. Usually, where such things are found, they are mediated by the efforts of the government or foreign donors. No doubt, the result of this study suggests that when Nigerians are volunteering, they are more likely to target familiar faces, hence, willingness to volunteer was more to the closer victim.

The non-significant gender differences found in the present study could be attributable to the current strive for gender equality in every aspect of human endeavours. Thus, women no longer regard themselves as handicapped before the demands of any situation. Men too seem to have understood that they are not alone in the struggle for a better society. Consequently, when human efforts are needed in a place where both genders are present, men seem no longer striving to “out-do” women.

The significant interaction of perceived locus of cause and gender suggests a differential motivation for help along gender identity. As predicted by Weiner’s (1985) motivational attribution theory, people are more likely to help when attribution is external. Therefore, a higher willingness to volunteer help for a victim when attribution is internal could suggest many things. One, it could be that the victim is a friend or a very close relative. Consideration that helping victims in Africa seems to run along familiarity, and where there is no competing demand to help another victim of the same condition, (who is also a close relative) one could channel all efforts to the victim at hand. Furthermore, the higher willingness to volunteer when attribution is internal could suggest a mind that is willing to over-look the other persons’ mistakes. Furthermore, the significant interaction of perceived locus of causality and gender found in the present study could be attributable to the assumed identity of the victim.

The results also indicate significant interaction of perceived locus of causality, social distance and gender on willingness to volunteer. Socially distant participants who made external

attribution were more willing to volunteer ($M = 6.00$) when compared with socially distant participants who made internal attribution ($M = 3.40$). In the same male category, socially close participants who made external attribution ($M = 4.90$) were more willing to volunteer compared with socially close participants who made internal attribution (4.70). In the female category, socially distant participants who made external attribution were less willing to volunteer ($M = 3.70$) when compared with socially distant participants who made internal attribution ($M = 5.40$). In the same female category, socially close participants who made external attribution were more willing to volunteer ($M = 6.00$) when compared with socially close participants who made internal attribution ($M = 5.90$). This suggests that females were more likely to volunteer help when the victim is closer to them, while men volunteer more when the victim is socially distant from them.

This, again, is consistent with Eagly and Crowley (1986) theory of social role in helping behaviour. In tandem with the social role theory of gender (Eagly & Crowley, 1986), the higher willingness among females who were socially close could be traceable to the African culture. For example, they are expected to care for their husbands and children, and thus, give most attention to family issues. Traditionally, working outside the home seems not pronounced, as a woman could easily resign from a job that threatens the unity of the family. These expectations are passed on from generation to generation. Even with the drastic rise in industrialization, gender equality, and affirmative action, many quarters in African society are yet to let go off women in pure domestic affairs, especially in places (example, Northern Nigeria) where religion is highly interwoven with culture. It is therefore, not surprising that women will tend to help more of those who are closer to them, in conformity to social role expectations. Thus, the result of the present study is not out of place.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study found non-significant effect of perceived locus of causality on willingness to volunteer help for a victim of car crash. This shows a shift from attitudes of blame and consequent withdrawal of help to attitude of respect for the dignity of human beings. This result is relevant to the current industrial atmosphere in Nigeria where victims (example, people living with HIV/AIDS) are blamed for their plights and, consequently, discriminated in paid labour. Therefore, the researchers encourage every Nigerian to face the challenges of encouraging those whose efforts are not good enough, and voluntarily providing assistance to others who have failed in their duties irrespective of the nature of the responsibility judgments.

This study found significant effect of social distance on willingness to volunteer help for a victim of car crash. This shows that people are more willing to help when those in need are related to them. This finding is relevant to the political atmosphere in Nigeria. Ethnicity, religious intolerance and greed for power and wealth have been the bane of Nigerian politics. They manifest in the form of discrimination in the faces of scarce resources such as political appointment, admission into the university, employment in industries and so on. In cases of election to political positions, Nigerian electorates believe that political salvation can only come to them if a person of their ethnic extraction is voted into power. However, this has created more problems for the country such as youth unrest and terrorism. Therefore, the researchers encourage all Nigerians to look beyond family ties and affiliations in providing help to people in need, and in voting people into power. This is because it is more dignifying of human nature to help strangers in addition to helping relatives. It will also be more dignifying for Nigeria as a country to elect government officials on merit than on ethnic, religious or family affiliations.

The study found non-significant effect of gender on willingness to volunteer help for a victim of car crash. This shows that males and females did not differ significantly in the amount of energy intended to spend in helping the victim. Thus, men and women seem to have understood the equality of gender. This result is relevant to this age of industrialization. In recent time, more women are going into paid labour, indicating increased willingness to assist the male folk in advancing the course of humanity. Men too seem to have accepted the challenges of co-operation with women in ventures such as child-rearing, thus, minimizing the gap between males and females in efforts to engage in behaviours that are prosocial. Therefore, the present researcher encourages every Nigerian to accommodate this recent development as it will go a long way in minimizing stress experienced with task overload.

Limitations of the Study

Some of the students were unwilling to join the group of volunteers who were recruited nine (9) days before the experiment, since no lecture was fixed on that day. When contacted a day after the experiment, some of them expressed this unwilling stressing further that they were bothered by the inconvenience of coming all the way from Enugu city to Agbani for an exercise that seemed unconnected to their academic prosperity, like having an “A” in a particular course. Moreover, some of the students who volunteered did not appear on the day of the experiment. These made a robust competitive random sampling difficult.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further researches should be organized with larger samples in different cultures, and with different age groups and professionals to give room for more valid generalisation. Furthermore, future researchers should include more variables into the study. Variables such as religious affiliation, educational level, marital status and socio-economic status should be included as independent variables. This will give more practical relevance to the study.

Finally, it is likely that participants were more or less willing to volunteer because the victim was an imaginary one. Perhaps, a completely different result would have been obtained if the participants were asked to indicate willingness to volunteer in a non-emergency situation for an observable victim in a known hospital.

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