HELP-SEEKING IN HINDU AND SIKH CULTURE AS DETERMINED BY ANONYMITY, IDENTIFIABILITY, LOCUS OF NEED ATTRIBUTION, AND SEX[#]

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Although help is welcomed whole-heartedly and viewed as something of instrumental value, there is growing evidence that recipient reactions to aid are not comprised solely of favourable responses. The receipt of aid may be either a self threatening or self supportive experience for the recipient. The study hypothesized that receipt of aid which is self threatening may not be welcomed by the recipient. Hindus and Sikhs were hypothesized to differ significantly in terms of help seeking. In the present research the effect of anonymity vs. identifiability, locus of need attribution (external vs. internal), and sex on help seeking behaviour were investigated. The results indicated that help was sought more when the condition was anonymous than identifiable, when need attribution was external than internal, and the sex of help seeker was female.

In our daily life we find that people prefer taking help when they are allowed the safety of anonymity. Anonymous recipients risk relatively little loss in public self esteem than their identifiable counterparts. Identifying oneself at the onset of request for help may be viewed as a public admission of one's failure thereby posing threat to one's self-esteem. Contexts in which recipients retain their anonymity appear to render aid less threatening (Shapiro, 1978). As shown in a study of Karabenick and Knapp (1988) individuals sought more help from a computer than from another person since seeking help from a computer allows it to remain a private event.

However, conditions of anonymity and identifiably also seem to interact with help seeker's attributional analysis. Help is costly in

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psychological sense when it is sought in settings in which the recipient believes that only few others need help (i.e., low consensus), the attribution of need is likely to be internal, and help seeking more self-threatening (LaMorto-Corse & Carver, 1980). On the other hand, when the problem is known to be shared by many individuals (i.e., high consensus), the need for help is attributed externally and help seeking less threatening. If help is perceived to be highly normative, subjects who are anonymous seek more help than those who are identifiable (Nadler & Porat, 1978). Under conditions of full identifiably, individuals may refrain from help seeking whether or not they attribute their need for help to external reasons.

In addition to the above variables, help-seeking seems to be more consistent with the feminine than the masculine sex role (Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neill, 1977). The female role emphasizing nurturance and emotional expressively may make it easier for women to disclose their problems to others, whereas the male role emphasizing achievement, success, and emotional in expressiveness make it difficult for men to seek support when they are under stress (Belle, 1987; Shumaker & Hill, 1991). The present experiment attempts to find out how does the phenomenon of anonymity identifiably in relation to help seeking behaviour differ in two social networks within India, i.e., Hindus and Sikhs. Sikhs are found to place more importance to honour, prestige, and freedom in comparison to their Hindu counterparts (Singh, 1987). Consequently, Hindus may indulge more in help-seeking than Sikhs. The hypotheses of the present study were as follows:

1. Help-seeking would be more in anonymous than in identifiable condition.

2. Help-seeking would be more in external than in internal locus of need attribution.

3. Help-seeking would be more in case of females than males.

4. Hindus and Sikhs would differ significantly in terms of their help-seeking behaviour.

METHOD

Sample

The samples were 64 post-graduate students (32 males and 32 females) ranging in age from 21 to 25 years. They were randomly selected from the teaching departments of Punjabi University, Patiala, a

city in north India. The subjects were randomly assigned to sixteen experimental conditions.

Instrument

The design of the experiment was a 2x2x2x2 factorial with two conditions (anonymous vs. identifiable), two levels of locus of need attribution (external vs. internal), sex (male vs. female), and two cultures (Hindus and Sikhs).

Procedure

The experimental task consisted of a test containing 30 concepts. Each participant was asked to define each concept in one line. The participant was instructed that if he/she did not know the meaning of any concept, he/she could ask for help by filling one Help-Request-Form for each concept separately. The number of Help-Request-Forms filled by each participant was the dependent measure of help-seeking.

Experimental Manipulations

Locus of need attribution: This variable was manipulated as follows:

(a) External need attribution: Participants were informed that only 10% of the past participants had answered all the questions correctly (i.e., high normativeness).

(b) Internal need attribution: Participants were told that 90% of the past participants had been able to answer all the questions correctly (i.e., low normativeness).

Anonymity vs. Identifiably: It was manipulated in the following ways:

(a) Anonymity: Participants were not asked to give personal information on the Help-Request-Form.

(b) Identifiably: Participants were instructed to fill in their personal data on the Help-Request-Form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and F-ratios as a function of anonymity-identifiability, locus of need attribution, gender, and culture

Variables	Levels	*M*	*SD*	*F*
Condition	Anonymous	8.03	4.71	
	Identifiable	5.78	3.40	4.71*
Need attribution	External	7.50	4.37	
	Internal	6.31	4.06	1.31
Gender	Males	5.39	3.02	
	Females	8.43	4.76	8.72**
Culture	Hindu	6.75	3.83	
	Sikh	7.06	4.65	.09

*p< .05; **p < .01

Table 2
ANOVA summary

SOV	*df*	*MS*	*F*
A	1	81.00	4.71*
B	1	22.56	1.31
C	1	150.06	8.72**
D	1	1.56	0.09
AB	1	0.56	0.03
BC	1	0.00	0.00
AC	1	30.25	1.75
AD	1	3.06	0.17
BD	1	0.57	0.03
CD	1	2.25	0.13
ABC	1	12.25	0.71
ABD	1	10.56	0.61
BCD	1	1.00	0.05
ACD	1	6.25	0.36
ABCD	1	16.00	0.93
Within	48	17.19	

*p< .05; **p < .01

In contrast to the hypothesis, neither the main effect of locus of need attribution nor culture did reach its significance level. However, the main effect of anonymity/identifiablity was significant [$F(1,48) = 4.71, p<.05$]. The participants took more help in anonymous ($M = 8.03$) than in identifiable condition ($M = 5.78$). Theory of deindividuation (Zimbardo, 1969) specified that anonymous condition would have minimized self observation and hence lowered the concern for social evaluation. This, in turn, could have led to lowered threshold for exhibiting inhibited behaviours (Babcock & Sabini, 1990). Anonymos condition decreases the fear of negative evaluation and the motive to avoid social exclusion (Miller, 1995). It further minimizes embarrassment and loss of public esteem which act as deterrents of help seeking. In contrast, identifiability of help seeking reflects a disquieting inability to act in ways that are consistent with one's projected social image (Silver, Sabini, & Parrott, 1987). Identifiable help seeking increases the accountability of behaviour which is usually restricted in society. It usually reflects the failure to live upto expectations, either one's or those of significant others (Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1989).

The main effect of sex was also found to be significant [$F(1, 48) = 8.72, p<.01$]. Females took more help ($M = 8.43$) than males ($M = 5.39$). These results could be explained in terms of definitions of masculine and feminine sex roles. Since males are supposed to be strong and independent and females are allowed and sometimes encouraged to be weak and dependent, seeking help is more consistent with the feminine than with the masculine sex role (Nadler, Maler, & Friedman, 1984). In general, this gender difference has been taken as implying that compared to men, women over-utilize help and engage in relatively more help seeking (Nadler, 1991). In fact, women were said to seek more help even if they could cope by themselves. Greenglass (1993) notes that in addition to "problem-focus" and "emotion-focus" coping identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), one should consider a third strategy "social coping" of which help-seeking is an integral part. Women employ this strategy more than men do. The greater willingness of women to seek help is also related to their socialization experiences that allow and even encourage dependency. Males may be more likely than females to see their own minor problems as controllable and be concerned that they will be scored rather than helped by their peers (Bruder-Mattson & Hovanitz, 1990).

To conclude, the present findings demonstrate that anonymity and sex of the help seeker are important determinants of help seeking

behaviour. However, as the experiment was conducted in simulated conditions using a small Indian sample, the results may be generalized with caution.

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