

Bystander Effect

By: Julie D. Bruno, Psy.D

With all the news of Ariel Castro, people are wondering how could such horrible things happen in their own back yard and though there are reports that neighbors called the police a couple of times during the last ten years, most who thought his behaviors odd, never took their suspicions further. Why didn't they, you might ask? Well, it's not because they didn't care or that they didn't want to get involved (some may have not for a variety of reasons), it's basically because of a very common social phenomenon called the Bystander Effect.

The bystander effect is the idea that when a collective people witness something happening, the presence of others diffuses responsibility. Hence, the more people, the less action that takes place and in the case of Ariel Castro, there is an entire neighborhood. This concept came about after the infamous 1964 Kitty Genovese murder in New York. Mr. Genovese was stabbed to death outside her apartment, while bystanders who reportedly observed the crime and people in nearby apartments heard her screams, did not step in to assist or call the police.

So, what can one do when they feel someone is acting outside of the norm or if they are witnessing a crime in a crowd of people? The answer is simple, now that you've read this blog, pick up the phone and call the authorities. Do not assume someone else will do it. Do not assume your suspicions are odd. A report can be made anonymously and who knows it could save someone's life.

