

Exploring the effect of Time Pressure on Moral Decision Making

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Abstract

Background: “Sometimes it’s the smallest decisions that can change your life forever”. Life is made of decisions however big or small they are, whichever area it may concern- family, work, etc. Having pressure along with keeping a track of one’s morals while deciding on something is another ball game altogether.

Objective: Therefore, the aim we carry here is to study the effect of presence and absence of time pressure on one’s moral judgement.

Methodology: Experimental Method is used to conduct the study. The age range of sample is 14 to 16 years. The sample of 60 students is segregated into two groups with 30 numbers each. 5 trolley problems were asked to be solved by both the groups. Group A had no time constraints while B was given 60 seconds per question restraint to answer.

Analysis & Finding: We have used one sample t-test for the situations individually and found out significant difference in the mean of the two groups.

Conclusion: As per the result calculation, it is concluded that decisions taken under pressure of time with guiding morals are tough and different from the one’s taken with a lot of thinking and consulting due to no time restraint.

Keywords: Time Pressure; Decision Making; Moral Judgement; Trolley Problem

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I. INTRODUCTION:

We have to make decisions all day be it deciding what to wear, eat or taking life changing decisions like deciding to relocate for a new job. Life is all about decision making, the catch here being the time we get to decide. Sometimes, if we are in a hurry, for example getting late for office and deciding to skip breakfast and then regretting it all day. In the chilly winter mornings that split second in which you decide to skip school or get up and go, then probably think about the fun you missed in whatever decision you take.

Now, if you had some more time to decide what to do you would have taken a more informed decision. We always take time when deciding about major things like, choosing a career, university, job, buying a house, car and many such decisions. And we are satisfied majorly because we had ample time to decide, there was no pressure on us.

But what if we had to buy a house, car, etc under time pressure? How would that turn out to be?

When we talk about moral decisions or judgements, which display our morality and these judgements can even hurt someone or have the power to make us look/sound selfish, immoral, insensitive, etc. These decisions under time pressure can create a very difficult situation.

Teenagers between 14-16 years of age are in a sensitive stage where they get influenced by what others say, schools have moral education lectures for them. This study is designed to check the moral judgement of such teenagers under time pressure and without it. To understand if there is any difference between the two groups, if time pressure plays a significant role in moral decision making. The findings from this study can lead to increased understanding about the age group and also help in outlining new intervention and activities.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Tinghog2016, studied the effect of intuitive thinking on moral judgement. The intuitive thinking was induced by time pressure and cognitive load. The study was conducted on 1400 subjects and the results proved that intuitive state has no effect on moral decisions.

Ordonzer 2015, did a review study on all the papers related to time constrains and decision making, mainly researches done in mid-2000s. It stated important facts concerning the subjects related to decision making like, negotiation, interactive decision making, ethical decision making.

Jin Ho Yun 2017, studies the moral incompetency under time constrains. The brain activity was monitored while the subjects were making a decision. It was observed that time constrains overburden the brain and makes it incompetent to make moral decisions.

Suter & Hertwig 2011, studied the relationship between time and moral judgement. The results suggested that under time pressure people tend to lean towards the deontological perspective and proved through experimental method that with time manipulations moral decisions can be altered.

Chen-Bo Zhong 2010, studied the effect of time pressure on ethical judgment and found a very different result, which proved that when people have ample of time they tend to take less ethical decisions as compared to under time constrains.

III. METHODOLOGY:

Participants:

1. The experiment was done on a sample of 60 students, 30 with time pressure and 30 without time pressure. There were 24 Males and 36 females.
2. Age: The age range was 14- 16 years and the average age was 15 years.
3. The students were from class 9th and 10th standard.
4. The study was conducted online on Google Meet and using a Google form.

Material Used:

A google form was created which had a section of demographic details and 5 trolley problems. The following trolley problems were asked:

1. A runaway trolley is heading down the tracks toward five workers who will all be killed if the trolley proceeds on its present course. You are standing next to a large switch that can divert the trolley onto a different track. The only way to save the lives of the five workers is to divert the trolley onto another track that only has one worker on it. If You divert the trolley onto the other track, this one worker will die, but the other five workers will be saved. Will you-
 - Pull the Switch
 - Not pull the switch
2. A runaway trolley is heading down the tracks toward five workers who will all be killed if the trolley proceeds on its present course. You are on a footbridge over the tracks, in between the approaching trolley and the five workers. Next to you, on this footbridge, is a stranger who happens to be very large. The only way to save the lives of the five workers is to push this stranger off the footbridge and onto the tracks below where his large body will stop the trolley. The stranger will die if You do this, but the five workers will be saved. Will you-
 - Push the Man
 - Not push the Man
3. A runaway trolley is heading down the tracks toward five million dollars of new railroad equipment which will be destroyed if the trolley proceeds on its present course. You are standing next to a large switch that can divert the trolley onto a different track. The only way to save the save the expensive equipment is to divert the trolley onto another track that only has one worker on it. If You divert the trolley, this one worker will die, but the equipment will be saved. Will you-
 - Pull the Switch
 - Not pull the switch
4. A runaway trolley is heading down the tracks toward five workers who will all be killed if the trolley proceeds on its present course. You are standing next to a large switch that can divert the trolley onto a different track. The only way to save the lives of the five workers is to divert the trolley onto another track that only has one worker on it. If You divert the trolley, this one worker will die, but the other five workers will be saved. There is another alternative, if you pull a cord which is near the switch the trolley will divert to 3rd path where no one will be killed. Will you-
 - Pull the Switch
 - Not pull the switch
 - Pull the cord
5. A runaway trolley is heading down the tracks toward five workers who will all be killed if the trolley proceeds on its present course. You are standing next to a large switch which can stop the trolley by destroying the bridge. But the bridge has a working walking on it. If you pull the switch, this one worker will die, but the other five workers will be saved. Will you-

- Pull the Switch
- Not pull the switch

Design and Procedure:

The experiment was conducted in 2 sessions, one with Group A (under time pressure) the other with Group B (without time constrains). The students were explained everything they had to do and the type of questions they will be asked, they were also told that there are no right or wrong answers for any question, they have to choose whichever they feel is the best option.

Group A was sent the Timed google form, 60 seconds per question. The questionnaire had total 5 trolley questions and self-introductory questions like Name, Age, etc.

Group B was sent a non-timed google form, there were not time constrains. The questionnaire had total 5 trolley questions and self-introductory questions like Name, Age, etc.

Once the answers were successfully recorded, students were asked about their experience and their understanding about the question. A mixed response was received. They were then explained about the aim of the study. Due to the pandemic the experiment was conducted online and therefore, extra precautions were taken to keep the study error free.

IV. RESULTS:

One Sample t-test was applied to each of the 5 situations individually and the mean of both group A and group B was compared.

One-Sample Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Bystander	16.858	29	.000	1.167	1.03	1.31

Situation 1

One-Sample Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Footbridge	21.108	29	.000	1.733	1.57	1.90
Footbridge_time	59.000	29	.000	1.967	1.90	2.03

Situation 2

One-Sample Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Expensive_Equipment	19.039	29	.000	1.667	1.49	1.85
Expensive_Equipment_time	34.106	29	.000	1.900	1.79	2.01

Situation 3

One-Sample Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Better_alternative	20.077	29	.000	2.633	2.37	2.90
Better_alternative_time	13.155	28	.000	2.138	1.81	2.47

Situation 4

One-Sample Test

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Collapse_bridge	19.039	29	.000	1.667	1.49	1.85
Collapse_bridge_time	16.551	29	.000	1.533	1.34	1.72

Situation 5

Hypothesis: We reject the null hypothesis (H_0)

H_0 : Time pressure will have no effect on Moral Judgement

H_a : Time pressure has a significant effect on Moral Decision Making

V. INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION:

The results above show that time pressure has a significant impact on moral decision making. One sample t-test of each situation shows that there is a significant difference between the results of group A and group B

The choices of the Trolley Problems can be interpreted in the following two ways:

The Utilitarian Perspective of trolley problem states that the best option is the one which leads to the good of greater people (Killing one innocent to save 5 people), whereas the deontological perspective states that certain actions are just wrong even if they prove to be good for a greater number of people. (Killing one innocent is just wrong if that means saving 5 people).

It is generally seen that people tend to decide according the utilitarian perspective when dealing with situations where the innocent person will be killed by pulling a cord or liver. Whereas, people decide according to the deontological perspective when dealing with situations where a person has to be deliberately pushed.

From our results we saw that Group A (Under time pressure) students stand true to the above explained ideology. Students choose the utilitarian perspective in switch questions and deontological perspective in the push a man question. However, the effect of time pressure is clearly seen in situation 4 where there is a third alternative to pull the cord and no one will die and students have selected other options rather than this one.

Answers of Group B (No time pressure) students do not align with the above explained ideology. They have given mixed responses, some students lean towards the utilitarian perspective, some towards the deontological, some show a mixed approach. The no time pressure clearly shows as in situation 4 these students have mostly chosen to pull the cord and save everyone.

VI. CONCLUSION:

We can conclude from the above discussion and results that time pressure has a significant impact on the moral judgement of the students. Time pressure creates a state of hurry and panic in which the first thought that comes to the mind helps in decision making, whereas without any time constrains students give time and thought to the situation which leads to an informed decision making. The results, however always depend on the sample size and the diversity of the given group, which is determined by the individuals present in the sample size. For this research, only teenagers have been selected and tested on and considered in its sample space. The results might differ if we change our sample to different age groups or a randomized group of individuals consisting of people of all ages.

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