Danuta Borecka-Biernat[1]

Avoidant Coping Strategies in Adolescents in Situations of Social Conflict: An Attempt to Identify Personality Indicators

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to determine the personality indicators of the avoidant coping strategy in adolescent youth in situations of social conflict. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (adapted by I. Dzwonkowska, K. Lachowicz-Tabaczek, and M. Łaguna), the Stress Assessment Questionnaire (Kwestionariusz Oceny Stresu, KOS) designed by D. Włodarczyk and K. Wrześniewski, and Questionnaire for Coping Strategies in Adolescents in Situations of Social Conflict (Kwestionariusz do badania strategii radzenia sobie młodzieży w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego) created by Borecka-Biernat (2012). The empirical research was conducted in middle schools on 893 adolescents (468 girls and 425 boys) aged 13 to 15. An analysis of the research results indicates that a young person's low assessment of own abilities and the assessment of a situation of conflict as a threat or harm/loss co-occur with the avoidant coping strategy in situations of social conflict.

Keywords:
self-esteem, youth, cognitive assessment, avoidant coping strategy, social conflict situation

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts with others are among the most common social situations in each person's life. The word "conflict" is derived from the Latin words "*confligere*" and "*conflictatio*", which mean collision, argument, discussion, fight, or clash between

1   Institute of Psychology, University of Wrocław, Wrocław, Poland.
E-MAIL: danuta.borecka-biernat@uwr.edu.pl ORCID: 0000-0003-1401-9821

two or more processes or natural forces. In the context of interpersonal relationships, a conflict is a type of interaction between the partners in which the differences in interests, needs, or aspirations become clearly emphasised (Balawajder, 2010).

Interpersonal conflicts affect people of all ages and in different environments. Adults do not always fully appreciate difficult situations young people encounter. Difficult social situations threatening the realisation of an individual's goals or fulfilling their needs are frequent in the lives of adolescents. Adolescence is when youth experience various, often contradictory pursuits and need to cope with inconsistent social expectations. The results of the research indicate that adolescents in this period consider interpersonal conflicts, including conflicts with teachers, arguments with schoolmates or romantic partners as well as quarrels with one or both parents or other members of the family, as the source of strong emotional arousal of a negative nature (Gurba, 2020; Guszkowska et al., 2001; Honness et al., 1997; Lohman & Jarvis, 2000; Polak, 2010; Rostowska, 2001; Różańska-Kowal, 2004; Smetana & Dadais, 2002). The most problematic situations between students and teachers are school grades, insensitive behaviour, controlling and oppressive attitude, and inflexible expectations on the teacher's part (Stańkowski, 2009). The main reasons for quarrels with peers are taunts, mocking, false accusations, betrayal, indiscretion, impolite behaviour, competition for grades, the interest of the opposite sex, position among classmates and reputation (Komendant, 2009). Conflict is inherent in families with adolescent children (Brzezińska et al., 2016). Most problems arising in mutual understanding between the parents and the children emerge from changes in the adolescent's attitude towards parents. Young people become less open in their interactions with parents, while parents are frequently unable to cope with the increasing autonomy of their children and try to impose limitations. Many of those conflicts have their source in ordinary daily situations, such as differing opinions and preferences regarding clothes, music, free time activities, or the young person's tendency to return home late in the evening (Garstka, 2011; Jaworski, 2000; Riescha et al., 2000; Sikorski, 2010). The adolescent's increased need to be independent clashes with the standards, expectations, and limitations established by the parents and with their tendency to control and supervise the life and behaviour of their children.

Social conflict situations are classified as difficult situations in social interactions. They accompany people in every period of their lives. From birth, each human being needs to learn to cope with the difficulties and challenges they face. A difficult situation encourages a young person to take action oriented towards regaining the balance between expectations and abilities or improving their emo-

tional state. The individual's activity is analysed in the context of a specific situation as a coping strategy (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000; Wrześniewski, 1996). Numerous studies and casual observation suggest that adolescent youth have at their disposal an extensive range of strategies which they apply to cope with situations of conflict that occur at school, in relationships with friends or at home (Borecka-Biernat, 2006); Donaldson et al., 2000; Gawryś, 2002; Gurba, 2020; Krok, 2007; Lachowska, 2010; Pisula & Sikora, 2008; Polak, 2010; Rostowska, 2001; Sikora & Pisula, 2002; Sikorski, 2015). These strategies include destructive ones, which are not oriented towards resolving and managing the situation of conflict, but only allow the individual to decrease the unpleasant emotional tension; the initial goal and the source of the conflict are replaced with the struggle to regain a good mood. It is achieved through avoiding confrontation with the situation of conflict. It involves postponing activities and efforts towards the resolution of conflict, engaging in activities that absorb the individual's attention and distract it from the conflict (watching television, listening to music, overeating, sleeping, doing sports, playing computer games, or surfing the Internet), and seeking interaction with other people (Borowiecka, 2005; Collins & Laursen, 1992; Filip, 2010; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1999; Smetana, 1991).

Human behaviour is neither a passive reflection of the environment's external influence nor the automatic consequence of internal impulses. An important role in determining the direction of activities performed by people is played by perceptive-cognitive schemes (Tyszkowa, 1986). A particular role among these schemes is played by the image of the world (the structure 'the world') and the image of oneself (the structure 'me'). The set of concepts, ideas, and expectations of oneself that builds the structure of the "self" plays a significant role in an individual's behaviour in difficult situations (Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Kulas, 1986; Tyszkowa, 1986). Information one has about oneself and traits that constitute the individual's knowledge of themselves are a basis for their assessment of their ability to cope with difficult situations (Leśniak, 2003). Self-esteem is inextricably connected with self-image; it is the qualitative and evaluative component of an individual's knowledge of their "self". It is usually described as the individuals' negative or positive attitude towards themselves (Gregg, 2003). Self-esteem is expressed through a less or more critical attitude towards oneself, and its level is an important element of its assessment (Szpitlak & Polczyk, 2015). According to Rosenberg (1965), high self-esteem is synonymous with an individual's image of oneself as good and valuable enough, which does not necessarily entail a sense of superiority. Low self-esteem, however, is identified as dissatisfaction with or rejection of one's "self".

Self-esteem as a central mechanism of personality is a factor of particular importance for human behaviour. The impact of self-esteem on an individual becomes visible in their functioning in difficult situations. An individual's behaviour in those situations depends not only on the traits and abilities they possess but also on their perception and assessment by the individual. In case of low self-esteem, the tendency to resign from achieving the goal, refrain from activities, and withdraw from social interaction may appear. Individuals with low self-esteem tend to be passive. They frequently do not believe in their own abilities and do not attempt to solve any difficult tasks, assuming that they are unable to; if they do attempt it, they tend to quickly lose their motivation (Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Brytek, 2007; Ogińska-Bulik, 2001; Tyszkowa, 1986). Lack of faith in one's powers, lack of resolve and self-confidence, and willingness to resign from activities due to experienced failures impede overcoming tensions and prevent solving conflict situations in people with low self-esteem (Kobosko, 2013; Kozielecki, 1981; Wosińska, 2004).

The cited data shows that low self-esteem lowers mental resistance to difficult situations, lowers the effectiveness of activities and inhibits adaptation or coping with a difficult situation. A tiny obstacle or a little threat in people with low self-esteem may provoke a tendency to withdraw from cooperation with others and avoid contact with people.

The functioning of an individual in a difficult situation depends to a large extent on their assessment of their circumstances (Lazarus, 1986). The person continuously evaluates information from their environment in the context of their significance and their own activities. Cognitive assessment is a subjective phenomenon based on data from one's surroundings and their unique significance for different individuals. Cognitive assessment refers also to the constant evaluation of the significance of what occurs in the external world and is of consequence for the individual's mental well-being (Włodarczyk, 1999). A cognitive assessment of a situation is, therefore, a process of categorisation of events from the perspective of their significance for the individual's well-being.

The particular role of cognitive assessment becomes evident during difficult situations that obstruct an individual's activity, are a threat to the person and hinder the realisation of their needs or make it impossible. A stressful event may be evaluated as harm/loss (sustained damage and losses connected with objects valuable to the individual), threat (refers to similar damage that has not occurred yet but is anticipated), and challenge (indicating the possibility of controlling the situation and obtaining something) (Lazarus & Folkamn, 1984; Włodarczyk & Wrześniewski, 2005). Study results show that the assessment of a difficult situa-

tion does not have to be expressed exclusively as harm/loss, threat, or challenge; its nature is complex and usually consists of all these elements, with one in a dominant position (Sęk, 2001).

Individual assessment of a specific difficult situation has an impact on the individual's decisions regarding their activities (coping strategies) aimed at removing the causes of the obstacle or at least alleviating its consequences (Heszen-Niejodek, 2002; Scherer et al., 1994; Włodarczyk & Wrześniewski, 2005; Wrześniewski, 1996). A factor determining the choice of coping strategy in a difficult situation is the interpretation of the situation or cognitive assessment performed by the individual (Włodarczyk, 1999). Various people prefer different coping strategies, depending on specific situations and the individuals' cognitive assessments of those situations. Abdullah et al. (2018), Anshel and Wells (2000), Bouchard (2003), Didymus and Fletcher (2014), Domińska-Werbel (2014), and Kobus and Reyes (2000) referred to the study results that indicated that assessment of a difficult situation as harm/loss or threat triggers coping reflexes focused on emotions, as well as avoidant strategies based on denial of information about the stressful event and protecting oneself from that information through engagement in the alternative, stress-free activities. The studies by Antonini (1998) showed that perception of a situation is a significant aspect that determines the choice of response in a conflict situation. The study proves that an avoidant strategy is preferred when an individual's interest in their own or their opponent's gain is low and when the cost or the risk caused by involvement in the conflict is high and the potential benefits insufficient. It explains the connection between the avoidant strategy and assessing a situation as a threat when the risk is high or as harm/loss when nothing is left to gain.

The presented study results indicate that assessing a situation as a threat or harm/loss facilitates the application of the avoidant strategy, oriented mostly towards releasing the unpleasant tension and alleviating the negative emotional states caused by the situation.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESES

The empirical research was focused on the personality indicators of the avoidant coping strategy in youth in situations of social conflict; the role of the level of self-esteem and cognitive assessment of the situation of social conflict was of particular interest. The research aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between the level of self-esteem and the avoidant coping strategy in youth in situations of social conflict? If yes, what is the nature of that relationship?
2. Is there a relationship between cognitive assessment of social conflict and the avoidant coping strategy in youth in situations of social conflict? If yes, what is that relation?
3. Which combination of variables connected with self-esteem and the cognitive assessment of conflict is linked to the fact that the avoidant coping strategies in young people increase during the social conflict?

These questions allow to formulate the following hypotheses, which can be verified after an analysis of the results of the conducted study:

H.1 Youth with low self-esteem more frequently apply the avoidant strategy in situations of social conflict.
H.2 Young people who assess conflict situations as a threat or harm/loss more frequently apply the avoidant strategy in conflict situations.
H.3 Young people with low self-esteem who assess situations of conflict as threat or harm/loss tend to more frequently adopt the avoidant coping strategy in situations of social conflict.

METHOD OF OWN RESEARCH

THE FOLLOWING METHODS WERE APPLIED IN THE STUDY:

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale adapted by Dzwonkowska, Lachowicz-Tabaczek, and Łaguna (2007) allows calculating the level of general (global) self-esteem in young people and adults. SES consists of ten diagnostic descriptive statements that the respondents use to self-evaluate. The respondent chooses one from four possible responses, for which they obtain 1 to 4 points. The final number of points lies between 10 and 40. A high result indicates a high level of general (global) self-esteem. The Polish version of SES is a reliable tool (Cronbach's alpha in various studies ranges between 0.81 and 0.83) of confirmed theoretical validity.

The Stress Assessment Questionnaire (Kwestionariusz Oceny Stresu, KOS), designed by Włodarczyk and Wrześniewski (2010), consists of 35 adjectives (including 23 diagnostic ones) evaluating stressful situations. It comprises two versions containing the same sets of adjectives with different instructions for the respondents. In version A (measuring the situational assessment of stress), the

respondents are asked to choose a specific difficult situation that happened within a week (in the described study, it was a social conflict situation). Version B (measuring dispositional assessment of stress) contains instructions in which respondents are asked to indicate to which extent the listed adjectives accurately describe their experience of difficult situations (in the described study, it was a social conflict situation). KOS contains 6 sub-scales which act as indicators of particular types of stress assessment, including the following: state-threat and trait-threat, state-harm/loss, trait-harm/loss, and state-challenge and trait-challenge. The "threat" sub-scales contain 10 items, the "challenge" sub-scales contain 6 items, and the "harm/loss" sub-scale contains 4 items. The questionnaire is characterised by sufficient reliability (Cronbach's alpha for Version A is 0.76–0.90 and for Version B 0.79–0.90), factor validity, and criterion validity.

Questionnaire for Coping Strategies in Adolescents in Situations of Social Conflict (KSMK) created by Borecka-Biernat (2012) is used to study coping strategies applied by adolescents in social conflicts. It contains 33 descriptions of situations of social conflict, each of which is accompanied by 4 coping behaviours: aggressive ("A"), avoidant ("U"), submissive ("S"), and task-oriented ("T"). Results are calculated separately for each scale by adding the coping behaviours chosen by the respondent on a particular scale. The Avoidant coping scale ("U") was used in own research. The Questionnaire is characterised by good reliability (Cronbach's alpha is around or above 0.70) and diagnostic validity.

PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

The studied sample included 468 girls and 425 boys aged 13 to 15. Overall, 893 individuals participated in the study. The participants were students of the first, second, and third years of secondary school. Schools were selected randomly, but not all agreed to participate; for this reason, several schools not previously selected were contacted and agreed to be involved in the study. Voluntary and anonymous participation was ensured for all participants; the study was conducted in compliance with standards for psychological research.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

In order to determine the possible relationship between the level of self-esteem and the avoidant coping strategy in youth in situations of social conflict, the obtained results were correlated on the Self-esteem Scale (SES) and in the "U" part (avoidant coping strategy in situations of social conflict) of the KSMK Questionnaire. Kurtosis and skewness for the analysed data fit within the range (-1, 1); the calculations were conducted with a parametric test. Results of the r-Pearson correlation

for the entire studied sample and groups of adolescents selected for gender are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Values of the Pearson correlation coefficient on the SES Self-esteem Scale and Scale "U" of the KSMK Questionnaire for the entire sample (N = 893) as well as separately for girls (N = 468) and boys (N = 425)

„U" Scale of the KSMK			
Questionnaire SES	Ov.	G.	B.
Scale Self-esteem	-0.10 $p < 0.004$	-0.007 ir.	-0.21 $p < 0.001$

„U": avoidant coping strategy in social conflict situations, Ov. – "overall", G. – "girls", B – "boys", ir. – "irrelevant".

Source: own study.

Data included in Table 1 indicate a statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), weak negative correlation between the level of self-esteem and the scale of avoidant coping strategy in situations of social conflict ("U") for the entire sample ($r = -0.10$), which is confirmed in the group of boys ($r = -0.21$). Results for the groups of girls ($r = -0.007$) show a similar tendency but below the significance level ($p < 0.05$). It appears likely that the lower the level of self-esteem, the more frequently the adolescent applies avoidant coping strategies in situations of social conflict (relevant for the entire sample and boys).

Analysis of statistical data included in Table 1 suggests that the level of self-esteem is not strongly connected with avoidant coping strategies in youth in situations of social conflict. Gender does not appear to determine the strength of the relationship between the variables. The empirical studies have confirmed the H1 hypothesis.

The relationship between the cognitive assessment of the situation of conflict (KOS) and the avoidant coping strategy in adolescents in situations of social conflict (KSMK) is presented through the correlation coefficient r. Information on the interdependence between the analysed variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 data indicates a weak positive correlation (for the entire sample; $r = 0.09$) between the avoidant coping strategy in situations of social conflict when the conflict is assessed as a threat. The correlation value in the group of girls is $r = 0.09$; in boys, it is $r = 0.10$. A weak positive correlation was observed between the dispositional assessment of conflict as a threat and the scale of the avoidant strategy for the entire studied sample ($r = 0.12$), as well as in two groups selected for gender (girls: $r = 0.10$; boys: $r = 0.14$). It can be concluded that the following

relationship occurs: the higher the level of situational and dispositional assessment of conflict as a threat, the more frequently avoidant strategies are used by adolescents in conflict situations.

Table 2. Values of the Pearson correlation coefficient on the KOS Questionnaire and Scale "U" of the KSMK Questionnaire for the entire sample (N = 893) as well as for girls (N = 468) and boys (N = 425)

Scales of the KOS Questionnaire	„U" Scale of the KSMK		
	Ov.	G.	B.
State-threat	0.09	0.09	0.10
	p < 0.006	p < 0.051	p < 0.051
Trait-threat	0.12	0.10	0.14
	p < 0.001	p < 0.03	p < 0.0005
State-harm/loss	0.11	0.11	0.11
	p < 0.002	p < 0.02	p < 0.03
Trait-harm/loss	0.12	0.15	0.10
	p < 0.001	p < 0.001	p < 0.051
State-challenge	-0.02	-0.04	-0.009
	n.i.	n.i.	n.i.
Trait-challenge	0.06	0.02	0.09
	n.i.	ir.	n.i.

„U": avoidant coping strategy in social conflict situations, Ov. – "overall", G. – "girls", B – "boys", ir. – "irrelevant".

Source: own study.

Analysis of the data included in Table 2 indicates a weak, statistically significant positive correlation between the situational assessment of conflict as harm (loss of material possessions or self-esteem, social status, or a loved one; state harm/loss) and the avoidant coping strategy for the entire studied sample (r = 0.11), girls (r = 0.11), and boys (r = 0.11). A statistically significant weak correlation was also observed between the dispositional assessment of conflict as experienced harm (loss of material possessions or self-esteem, social status, or a loved one; trait-harm/loss) and the avoidant strategy for the entire studied sample (r = 0.12), for girls (r = 0.15), and boys (r = 0.10). It appears likely that the higher the level of situational and dispositional assessment of conflict as harm/loss, the more frequently avoidant coping strategies are applied by youth in situations of social conflict.

An analysis of the study results included in Table 2 indicates that the correlation between the situational and dispositional assessment of the conflict in the

context of anticipated benefit (state- and trait-challenge) and the avoidant coping strategy is statistically insignificant for the entire studied sample as well as for the groups segregated by gender. It can be assumed that the situational and dispositional assessment that frames the conflict as a challenge is not related to the avoidant coping strategy in youth in situations of social conflict.

Based on the conducted statistical verification, it can be concluded that the results confirmed hypothesis H2.

In order to determine which combination of personality variables predicts the level of the avoidant strategy in situations of social conflict in youth, a multiple regression analysis was conducted (stepwise procedure). IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0.0.2 program was used to calculate the results. Did not include the values in which statistical relation was not achieved. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The stepwise multiple regression of the results in the Avoidance ("A") scale of the KSRK questionnaire compared with the SES and KOS scales; results for the entire group (N = 893), for girls (N = 468) and boys (N = 425)

Surveyed people	Variable	β	b	SE	t	p ‹
Total	Self-esteem	-0.08	-0.06	0.03	-2.29	0.02
	Trait-threat	0.08	0.04	0.02	2.32	0.02
	State – harm/loss	0.07	0.08	0.04	2.06	0.004
	Constant term		4.63	0.84	5.51	0.0000001

Multiple correlation coefficient: $R = 0.16$
Multiple determination coefficient: $R^2 = 0.03$
Equation significance: $F_{(3.889)} = 7.48$; $p < 0.00006$
Standard error of estimate: 3.43

Girls	Trait-harm/loss	0.15	0.18	0.06	3.20	0.002
	Constant term		2.80	0.35	8.07	0.0000001

Multiple correlation coefficient: $R = 0.15$
Multiple determination coefficient: $R^2 = 0.02$
Equation significance: $F_{(1.466)} = 10.27$; $p < 0.002$
Standard error of estimate: 3.37

Boys	Self-esteem	-0.20	-0.17	0.04	-4.29	0.00002
	State – harm/loss	0.10	0.12	0.06	2.11	0.04
	Constant term		8.32	1.24	6.72	0.0000001

Multiple correlation coefficient: $R = 0.30$
Multiple determination coefficient: $R^2 = 0.05$
Equation significance: $F_{(2.422)} = 11.77$; $p < 0.00001$
Standard error of estimate: 3.44

Source: own study.

The indicator of the avoidant strategy as a coping method in situations of social conflict in youth (respondents overall) are the following: dispositional assessment of conflict as a threat, situational assessment of conflict as harm/loss, and self-esteem. The explained variance for the avoidant coping strategy in youth is 3% ($R^2 = 0.03$; F[3.889] = 7.48; p < 0.00006). β values show that the lower the self-esteem, the higher the level of the dispositional assessment of conflict as a threat, and the higher level of situational assessment of conflict as harm/loss, the higher the level of avoidant coping strategy in adolescents in situations of social conflict.

Separate analyses were conducted for groups of respondents divided by gender (Table 3). The stepwise regression analysis has shown that among the variables introduced in the regression model, one (dispositional assessment of conflict as harm/loss) was significant for explaining the avoidant strategy in girls in situations of social conflict. The variable explains, in total, 2% of the variability of the girls' results on the "A" scale of the KSMK questionnaire ($R^2 = 0.02$; F[1.466] = 10.27; p < 0.002). β values indicate that the higher the level of dispositional assessment of conflict as harm/loss, the higher the level of the avoidant coping strategy in girls in situations of social conflict.

However, the parameters of the regressive equation, including its significance, suggest that self-esteem and the situational assessment of conflict as harm/loss significantly impact the level of the avoidant coping strategy in situations of social conflict in boys (Table 3). The determination coefficient is $R^2 = 0.05$ and indicates that these variables explain 5% of the avoidant coping strategy in boys (F[2.422] = 11.77; p < 0.00001). β values indicate that the lower the self-esteem and the higher the assessment of conflict as harm/loss, the higher the level of the avoidant coping strategy in boys in situations of social conflict.

In the light of the conducted statistical verification, it can be concluded that the obtained results allowed to verify hypothesis H.3. It is worth noting that the selected personality variables are not strong predictors of the avoidant coping strategy in youth in situations of social conflict, as shown by the result $R^2 = 0.2$-0.5.

CONCLUSIONS

Adolescents are aware of their abilities and limitations, which impact their functioning in situations of social conflict. The study shows that low self-esteem and a low evaluation of one's abilities and efficiency facilitates the emergence of avoidant coping strategies, which reduce an individual's emotional tension caused by the experienced conflicts (Campbell, & Lavallee, 1993; Martowska, 2012). As

can be observed, a negative attitude towards oneself and doubt in one's abilities contribute to an individual's withdrawal from social interaction, avoidance of relationships with others, inaction, lack of trust, and hostile social attitude. An aversion towards other people and an inability to overcome that barrier results in frequent conflicts with the environment. Lack of faith in oneself and inaction caused by failures constitute an obstacle to coping with tensions. These elements of low self-esteem result in the inability to solve conflicts (Wosińska, 2004). On the other hand, low self-esteem is connected with reduced activity, lack of investment in problem-solving, anxiety, and unwillingness to participate in interpersonal contacts (Napora, 1999). Thus, low self-esteem indicates withdrawal from the activity and a lack of motivation to reach one's goals in a difficult situation. A young person who chooses avoidant behaviour in a conflict situation becomes involved in alternative activities which protect their "self" (ways to escape from the problem) and/or seeks social interactions without attempting to solve the problem.

A significant factor determining the choice of action in conflict is the perception of the conflict by the individual (Reykowski, 2002). A higher situational and dispositional assessment of conflict as threat or harm/loss has been observed in young people who apply the avoidant strategy in situations of social conflict. Studies have confirmed that a sense of possibility of losing material possessions, health, relatives, loved ones, or social status, experiencing damage, or losing significant objects in a social conflict situation may cause a tendency to avoid an active approach to conflicts through involvement in other stress-free activities aimed at reducing the unpleasant emotional tension rather than seeking a solution to the problem. As can be seen, this strategy is a decision whether or not one should become involved in the conflict. The process of making this decision involves an evaluation of the possible gains and losses (Antonini, 1998). The avoidant strategy is preferred when the costs or risks of involvement in the conflict are high, and the possible benefits are insufficient. Young persons who notice that their opponents' behaviour has already caused some damage to, for example, their sense of self-worth, become more eager to withdraw from the situation. To an extent, this explains the observed relationship between the avoidant strategy and the assessment of conflict as a threat when the risk is high, as well as the assessment of conflict as harm/loss when the individual does not have anything more to gain and is convinced that the situation is irreversible. Escaping the conflict eventually leads to abandonment of the original goals due to the encountered obstacles. The goal "to achieve X" is replaced with "reduce the unpleasant emotional tension" (Maruszewski, 1984). Avoiding the confrontation with the conflict, which involves alternative activities that absorb the individual's attention and distract them from the conflict, as well as seeking interaction with other people,

are expressions of defence of one's self from the threat or the experienced damage in the form of loss of material possessions or other losses, for example, connected with health, social status, a loved one or a family member (Heszen-Niejodek, 2002). The observed tendency seems to be consistent with the results obtained by Anshel and Wells (2000), Bouchard (2003), Domińska-Werbel (2014), Miklulincer and Victor (1995), and Włodarczyk and Wrześniewski (2010).

To conclude: the conducted study has revealed that, in young people, a lower assessment of one's abilities, as well as assessment of a situation of conflict as threat or harm/loss, co-occur with the tendency to choose the avoidant coping strategy in conflicts.

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