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## DETERMINANTS OF AGGRESSIVE COPING STRATEGIES IN ADOLESCENT YOUTH IN SITUATIONS OF SOCIAL CONFLICT

**Abstract:** The purpose of the study was to find personality and family predictors of aggressive coping strategies in adolescent youth in situations of social conflict. The Questionnaire for Analysis of Coping Strategies in Adolescents in Situations of Social Conflict (Kwestionariusz do badania strategii radzenia sobie młodzieży w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego, KSMK; designed by D. Borecka-Biernat), the Questionnaire for Analysis of the Sense of Control (Kwestionariusz do Badania Poczucia Kontroli, KBPK; designed by G. Krasowicz and A. Kurzyp-Wojnarska, the Stress Assessment Questionnaire (Kwestionariusz Oceny Stresu, KOS; designed by D. Włodarczyk and K. Wrześniewski), as well as M. Plopa's Parental Attitude Scale (Skala Postaw Rodzicielskich, SPR) were used in the study. The empirical research was conducted in

secondary schools on a sample of 893 adolescents (including 468 girls and 425 boys) in the age range of 13 to 15. In the light of the conducted studies it was determined that a strong conviction of the influence of other people on positive or negative outcomes of events, as well as the assessment of a situation of conflict as threat coincides with aggressive coping strategies in youth in situations of social conflict. The analysis of the results has revealed that the tendency to react aggressively to emotional tension generated in social conflict is shaped by an inappropriate parental attitude, characterized by an emotional distance of a parent to their adolescent child.

**Keywords:** secondary school youth, locus of control, cognitive appraisal, parental attitudes, aggressive coping strategy, situation of social conflict.

### INTRODUCTION

Difficult situations are not exceptional occurrences in life; on the contrary, they happen regularly since early childhood; challenges cannot be eliminated from life. They create a threat to the values followed by an individual, to satisfaction of their needs, and to realization of social goals. Difficult situations do not constitute a uniform class, but are a varied category. Multiple types of obstacles can arise, overlap, and become dependent on each other. An important group of difficult situations are social conflicts, in which an individual's aspirations are incompatible with aspirations of other people, and the realization of the individual's aspirations is threatened (Borecka-Biernat).

nat, 2006). The word “conflict” is derived from Latin *confligere*, or *conflictatio*, which means clash, argument, discussion, fight, or collision of two or more processes or forces particular to living creatures. A collision might be the beginning of a fight. Many people wrongly associate conflict with direct physical and/or verbal aggression and accompanying hostility that increases the existing contradictions. This type of conflict is saturated with negative emotions. The majority of phenomena which may be described as conflicts take relatively mild forms of a short altercation, discussion, or debate (Olubiński, 1992).

Adolescence is a period during which young people have various, frequently conflicting goals and have to cope with inconsistent social expectations. Difficult social situations containing an element of threat to realization of aspirations or reaching goals (satisfactions of needs) are particularly frequent in adolescents’ lives. Each day, young people face the necessity of solving various problems connected with school, peers, or family life. The results of studies conducted so far indicate that adolescent youth considers interpersonal conflicts (including conflicts with teachers, arguments with schoolmates, romantic partners, and one or both parents and other family members) a source of intense, negative emotional experiences (Jaworski, 2000; Guskowska et al., 2001; Różańska-Kowal, 2004; Woźniak-Krakowian and Wieczorek, 2009; Polak, 2010; Miłkowska, 2012).

Difficult situations encourage young people to take action oriented towards regaining the balance between expectations and abilities and/or improvement of their emotional state. Activity undertaken in a difficult situation is considered, in a specific situational context, as a coping strategy in a current difficult situation (Wrześniewski, 1996; Heszen-Niejodek, 2000). Empirical material in literature indicates that youth applies many different strategies of coping in difficult social interactions, including social conflicts (Jaworski, 2000; Frączek, 2003; Trylińska-Tekielska, 2005; Borecka-Biernat, 2006). These strategies are usually behaviours whose goal is to regulate emotional response; fewer are oriented towards working through the problem, analyzing it, and attempting to change the situation. One of those strategies is aggression in the form of initiated physical or verbal attack directed towards specific persons, causing damage to the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of those persons (it results in pain, suffering, and destruction leading to the loss of important values), and aimed towards avoiding or minimizing tensions, losses, and unfavourable consequences.

This means that aggression is a way of solving conflict and eliminating tensions and frustrations. Why does youth in situations of social conflict choose aggressive coping strategies? The concept of psychological mechanism of human behaviour in difficult situations, designed by M. Tyszkowa (1986) may be helpful in finding an answer to this question. According to this author, an important role is played by the processes connected with perception of the external situation, and the cognitive schemas that form them, as well as coping mechanisms acquired in specific conditions and the emotional tension that they evoke.

Functioning of an individual in difficult situations is determined by their subjective conviction of their ability to control the situation (Tyszkowa, 1978). We treat our successes and failures as a consequence of powers beyond our control or as a result of our own actions and abilities – these two attitudes are referred to, respectively, as *an external locus of control* or *an internal locus of control* (Drwal, 1978). Generally speaking, people tend to perceive most situations as ones in which the factors beyond their

control heavily influence the results of their activities, and thus perceive themselves as unable to control the situation in which they are. Some people, however, tend to consider their situation a consequence of their actions, thus perceiving themselves as “in control”. The sense of control determines the strategies of human behaviour, as both in selection of the situations of interdependence, as during the conflict itself, an individual pursues realization of their preferred type of control (Dowhań, Sadowska, 1986). The locus of control has a function of regulating and modifying the individual's activity in difficult situations. It means that the individual's subjective perception of their control over their environment are an important variable regulating the process of coping with difficult situations and predicting the remedial measures that the individual might undertake (Krause, Stryker, 1984; Kurtek, 2005).

The studies conducted by K. Zajączkowski (1992), I. Pufal-Struzik (1997), H. Kulas (1998), M. Gacek (2000), P. Kurtek (2005), D. Borecka-Biernat (2006) indicate that persons who believe that their actions have little influence on their achievements, and who perceive the outcomes of their activities as beyond their control, apply an aggressive coping strategy during stressful confrontations that they assess as ones they are not able to personally control. T. Rostowska (2001) has also determined that conflicts between young people and others (including mutual dislike and blaming) are forms of behaviour that coincide with a cognitive assessment of a situation as one that cannot be controlled, which causes an increased tendency to engage in conflicts. As can be seen, assessing a situation as one that is beyond one's control is connected with aggressive coping strategies.

Human activity in a difficult situation depends largely on one's assessment of their circumstances. In order to predict an individual's behaviour, it is important to learn how they perceive their situation and what significance they assign to it. A difficult situation which disturbs one's routine activities, forms an obstacle to realization of one's needs – or makes it impossible – may be assessed as harm/loss (it refers to the losses and damage experienced in connection with significant objects and items), threat (it refers to damage of a similar type, but one that has not yet occurred and is still anticipated), or challenge (referring to the possibility of controlling the situation and gaining something) (Włodarczyk, 1999; Włodarczyk, Wrześniewski, 2005). Individual assessment of a specific event has impact on the decisions made by the person who experiences it, connected with their ability to undertake action aimed towards removing the causes of the difficult situation or at least alleviating its consequences; this action is referred to as a coping strategy (Scherer et al., 1994; Włodarczyk, 1999; Heszen-Niejodek, 2000). Thus, the fact that determines the choice of coping strategy in difficult social situations is interpretation of one's current situation, that is, the cognitive appraisal performed by the individual. The data obtained by L. Chandler (1986), and D. Domińska-Werbel (2014) indicates that young people who apply aggressive coping strategies in difficult social situations are characterized by an increased tendency to situational and dispositional appraisal of difficult situations as harm/loss. M. Guskowa (2003), K. Kowalski, P. Crocker, and S. Hoar (2005) have determined, however, that the participants of the study who assessed a difficult situation as threat, tended to apply emotional coping mechanisms when they faced a problem. Their entire effort was directed towards lowering the unpleasant tension by means of a violent discharge and/or activating defensive mechanisms, instead of seeking a real solution to the problem. Generally speaking, individuals who assess their situation as harm/loss or threat, tend to be aggressive if conflict occurs.

An aggressive coping strategy in difficult social situations is a behaviour acquired via general learning mechanisms. An individual's interpretation of an encountered obstacle and their behaviour in social conflict depend largely on the acquired reflexes shaped in specific circumstances, on the basis of which the individual shapes their manner of reacting to difficulties. Parental attitudes and the dynamic between the parents and the child plays a critical role in their social development and becomes, for the child, a prototype of social coexistence and a model for solutions to difficult social situations (Tyszkowa, 1986). Raised by parents whose attitudes differ, children function in different conditions and they have access to different ways of forming specific coping mechanisms. It is worth noting that coping mechanisms in adolescents are shaped not as much by their parents' influence as by the young people's perception of their parents' attitudes. Thus, studying adolescents' relationship with their parents on the basis of their subjective perspective is a more valuable source of knowledge on the determinants of their social development than basing research on an objective assessment of the situation (Wolińska, 2000). It is for this reason that, in research, the parental attitude is understood as a construct expressed by young people's perception of their parents' activity. Literature (Wolińska, 2000; Januszewska, 2001; Łukaszewicz, 2002; Poraj, 2002; Guszowska, 2004; Liberska et al., 2013; Batool, 2013) presents data confirming that aggressive forms of reacting to social difficult situations (especially to conflicts) in a child are a result of inappropriate parental attitudes, which can be divided into the following categories: 1. *excessive distance*, 2. *excessive demands*, 3. *excessive protectiveness*, and 4. *inconsistency*. Negative behaviour in parents causes a deprivation in the child's needs, in particular its sense of security, contact with the closest relatives, love, acceptance, and appreciation. It is believed that a person lacking the sense of social security who experiences anxiety, helplessness, and a sense of threat connected with the area of interpersonal contacts, activates an aggressive reaction oriented towards lowering the unpleasant emotional tension.

To summarize, the psychological concept of the mechanism of human behaviour in difficult situations, designed by M. Tyszkowa (1986), assigns a particularly significant role, in incidence of negative reactions to social conflicts in youth, to the general system of regulation that is constituted by personality and the specific environment in which the child functions within their family.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESIS

The empirical studies were focused on the personality and family determinants of the aggressive coping strategy in young people in situations of social conflict. Attention was paid particularly to the role of the locus of control, the type of the cognitive appraisal of the situation of social conflict, and the parental attitudes towards the child. The aim of the study was to find an answer to the following questions:

1. Is there a correlation between the personality and family variables and an increased tendency to apply aggressive coping strategy in adolescents in situations of social conflict? If it exists, what is its character?

H.1. The sense of an external locus of control, an assessment of a situation of social conflict as threat or harm/loss, and perception of parental attitudes as inappropriate predict an increased likelihood of application of aggressive coping strategies in situations of social conflict.

## METHOD

**Participants and the conduct of the study.** *Participants and the conduct of the study.* The studied sample consisted of 468 girls and 425 boys in the age range of 13 to 15. Overall, 893 individuals participated in the studies. The participants were students of the first, second, and third years of the secondary school. Voluntary and anonymous participation were ensured for all participants; the study was conducted in compliance with standards for psychological research. The basic criterion for selection of the participants was age. The influence of age on the choice of aggressive coping strategy in a situation of social conflict was studied on a sample of participants aged 13 to 15 (early adolescence). As a time of transition from childhood to adulthood – also described as the period of rebellion and resistance – adolescence is an important stage in an individual's life. It is during adolescence that many biological, psychological, mental, motivational, and social changes occur, which causes numerous difficulties connected with adjusting a young person's behaviour to accommodate new situations that they encounter, as well as new tasks and social roles (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2003).

**Research tools.** The following tools were used in the study:

*The Questionnaire for Studies on the Sense of Control* (Kwestionariusz do Badania Poczucia Kontroli, KBPK), designed by G. Krasowicz, A. Kurzyp-Wojnarska (1990), the Stress Assessment Questionnaire (Kwestionariusz Oceny Stresu, KOS) designed by D. Włodarczyk and K. Wrześniewski (2010), the Parental Attitude Scale (Skala Postaw Rodzicielskich, SPR) by M. Plopa (2007), and the Scale "Aggressive Coping in Situations of Social Conflict" from the Questionnaire for Analysis of Coping Strategies in Adolescents in Situations of Social Conflict (Kwestionariusz do badania strategii radzenia sobie młodzieży w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego, KSMK) by D. Borecka-Biernat (2012).

*The Questionnaire for Studies on the Sense of Control (KBPK)* by G. Krasowicz and A. Kurzyp-Wojnarska (1990) consists of 46 forced response questions; 36 are diagnostic questions and the remaining 10 are buffer questions. The diagnostic questions refer to simple situations connected with school life; they form two scales: the Scale of Success (S) and the Scale of Failure (F). The questions which describe favourable circumstances are included in the Scale of Success (S), while the questions which refer to unfavourable events are included in the Scale of Failure (F). The sum of results obtained from both scales creates the ratio of the generalized sense of control (S + F). Low results obtained in KBPK indicate a sense of external control of the consequences of events, and a high result suggests a sense of internal control of the consequences of events. The Questionnaire is characterized by a sufficient reliability (the internal consistency coefficient KR-20 for the S Scale is .54, and .69 for the F Scale) and criterion validity.

*The Stress Assessment Questionnaire* (Kwestionariusz Oceny Stresu, KOS) designed by D. Włodarczyk and K. Wrześniewski (2010), is comprised of 35 adjective phrases (including 23 diagnostic questions) describing stressful situations. The questionnaire consists of two versions containing the same sets of the adjective phrases but different instructions for the participants. In version A (measurement of the situational assessment of stress) the participants are asked to indicate a specific difficult situation that occurred during the previous week (the present study used a situation of social conflict). Version B (measurement of dispositional assessment of stress) contains an in-

struction in which the participants are asked to mark the degree to which the provided adjectives are consistent with what they most frequently experience in difficult situations (the present study used a situation of social conflict). KOS consists of 6 subscales which indicate specific types of stress assessment, including state-anxiety, trait-anxiety, trait-harm/loss, state-challenge, and trait-challenge. The “anxiety”, “challenge”, and “harm/loss” subscales consist of 10, 6, and 4 items respectively. The questionnaire is sufficiently accurate and reliable (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for version A was .76-.90, and for version B .79-.90).

*The Parental Attitudes Scale* (Skala Postaw Rodzicielskich, SPR) by M. Plopa (2007) is used to study parental attitudes as perceived by children. It is comprised of 75 statements in two versions: for the mother and for the father. The questionnaire consists of 5 scales each of which contains 15 statements corresponding to Acceptance-Rejection Attitude, Autonomy, Excessively Protective Attitude, Excessively Demanding Attitude, and Inconsistent Attitude. The Questionnaire is sufficiently reliable (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for the version “My Mother” was .81-.92, and .79-.91 for “My Father”) and characterized by construct validity and criterion validity.

*The KSMK Questionnaire* designed by D. Borecka-Biernat (2012) examines coping strategies in situations of social conflict applied by adolescent youth. It is comprised of descriptions of 33 situations of social conflict. Each description is accompanied by four types of coping behaviour in a situation of social conflict: aggressive coping (“A”), coping by avoidance (“U”), coping by submission (“UI”), and task-oriented coping (“Z”). The results are obtained separately for each scale, by summing up the behaviours marked by the participant in the 33 situations. The aggressive coping scale (“A”) for youth in situations of social conflict was used for the purpose of this study. The Questionnaire is characterized by sufficient accuracy (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  was around or above .07) and convergent validity.

## RESULTS

In order to determine which personality and family variables predict the level of the aggressive coping strategy in situations of social conflict in adolescents, hierarchical regression was used and backward elimination was applied (criterion: probability-of-f-to-remove  $\geq 0.100$ ). In this method, all potential predictors are introduced into the model and the irrelevant variables are subsequently removed, after which the model is recalculated until the final version is obtained (Bedyńska, Książek, 2012). The category “A” results in the KSMK questionnaire were assumed as the dependent variable; the results obtained in the two scales (Success and Failure) from the KBPK questionnaire, in the six scales (trait-anxiety and state-anxiety, trait-harm/loss and state-harm/loss, trait-challenge and state-challenge) from the KOS questionnaire, and in the five scales (Acceptance-Rejection Attitude, Autonomy, Excessively Protective Attitude, Excessively Demanding Attitude, and Inconsistent Attitude) from the SPR questionnaire (in the “my mother” and “my father” version) were treated as a set of independent variables. A regression analysis was performed on the results obtained from the entire studied group of adolescents; separate regression analyses were also performed, after dividing the participants by gender. The results are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Multiple stepwise regression for the results of the Aggression scale (A) in the KSMK Questionnaire, in relation to the KBPK scales, the KOS scales, and the SPR scales: results for the entire group (N = 893) as well as for girls (N = 468) and boys (N = 425)

Studied Individuals	Variable	Beta	B	Standard error B	t	Level p<
<b>Overall</b>	State-harm/loss	-.08	-.11	.05	-2.06	
	State- anxiety	.10	.07	.03	2.76	.040
	Success	-.19	-.29	.05	-5.40	.006
	Failure	-.11	-.16	.05	-3.04	<.001
	A-R Mother	-.16	-.07	.01	-4.70	.002
	Incon. Mother	.14	0.05	.01	4.19	<.001
	Free ind.		11.98	1.27	9.43	<.0001
Multiple correlation coefficient: R = .43 Coefficient of multiple determination: R <sup>2</sup> = .18 Significance of the equation: F(6,886) = 33.31; p < .00001 Standard estimation error: 4.21						
<b>Girls</b>	Success	-0.18	-0.26	0.07	-3.60	<0.001
	Failure	-0.19	-0.28	0.07	-3.77	<0.001
	A-R Mother	-0.15	-0.06	0.02	-3.09	0.002
	Dem. Mother	0.11	0.04	0.02	2.38	0.020
	Free ind.		12.58	1.72	7.31	<0.001
Multiple correlation coefficient: R = 0.43 Coefficient of multiple determination: R <sup>2</sup> = 0.16 Significance of the equation: F(4,463) = 26.30; p < 0.00001 Standard estimation error: 4.21						
<b>Boys</b>	Success	-0.23	-0.34	0.07	-5.07	<0.001
	A-R Mother	-0.20	-0.08	0.02	-4.10	<0.001
	Incon. Mother	0.18	0.06	0.002	3.85	<0.001
	Free ind.		11.82	1.70	6.96	<0.001
Multiple correlation coefficient: R = 0.43 Coefficient of multiple determination: R <sup>2</sup> = 0.18 Significance of the equation: F(3,421) = 31.40; p < 0.00001 Standard estimation error: 4.19						

Note: A-R Acceptance-Rejection attitude, Incon. - Inconsistent attitude, Dem. - Demanding attitude

The first regression analysis was performed on the results obtained from the entire studied sample, regardless of gender. As can be seen in Table 1, the following six variables had significant influence on the aggressive coping strategy in youth in situations of social conflict: state-loss/harm, state-anxiety, locus of control in success, locus of control in failure, the acceptance-rejection attitude in the mother, and the inconsistent attitude in the mother. They explain 18% of variance in application of the discussed strategy, and the described model is well adjusted [ $F(6,886) = 33.31$ ;  $p < 0.00001$ ]. The remaining variables were not significant determinants of the frequency of application by adolescents of the aggressive strategy in situations of social conflict.

The beta slope indicated that a lower level of situational assessment of the conflict as harm/loss, a higher level of situational assessment of the conflict as a threat, a stronger sense of the external locus of control for success and failure, as well as a higher level of emotional coldness, disapproval, hostility, rejection of the child by the mother, and a higher level of the attitude in which the mother's behaviour towards the

child is variable have influence on the increase of the frequency of application by adolescents of the aggressive coping strategy in situations of social conflict.

Separate regression analyses were conducted after dividing the participants by gender (compare: Table 1). Stepwise regression analysis has shown that out of thirteen independent variables introduced in the regression model, four were of high significance for explaining the use of aggressive coping strategy by girls in a situation of social conflict. The remaining monitored indicators did not show statistically significant correlations with aggressive coping strategy in girls. The calculations indicate that the sense of the locus of control in success and in failure, the Acceptance-Rejection attitude in the mother, and the Excessively Demanding attitude in the mother play an important determining role for application of the aggressive coping strategy by girls. The enumerated predictors explain 16% of variance in application of the discussed strategy by girls, and the described model is well adjusted [ $F(4,463) = 26.30$ ;  $p < 0.00001$ ].

It is evident that in situations of social conflict, girls more often apply the aggressive coping strategy if their sense of external locus of control is higher (separately for success and failure), if the level of emotional coldness, disapproval, hostility, and rejection of the daughter by the mother is higher, and if the mother raises the daughter according to a strict model of parenting.

Another examined problem was which group of personality and family variables has influence on the level of aggressive coping strategy in boys in situation of social conflict. The following three independent variable proved significant in the regression equation: the sense of the locus of control in success, the Acceptance-Rejection attitude in the mother, and the Inconsistent attitude in the mother. The discussed model proved to be well adjusted to the data [ $F(3,421) = 31.40$ ;  $p < 0.00001$ ] and explained 18% of the variance of the dependent variable. The standardized *beta* coefficients revealed that the increase in the use of the aggressive strategy in boys in the context of social conflict is influenced by a higher sense of external locus of control in success, a higher level of emotional coldness, disapproval, hostility in the mother and of her rejection of the son, and a higher level of the attitude in which the mother's behaviour towards the son is variable and dependent on mood changes.

To summarize the conducted regression analysis, the assumed personality and family variables have confirmed the validity of the formulated hypothesis H.1.

## DISCUSSION

A significant factor that determines the choice of action in conflict is its perception (Reykowski, 2002). The conducted analysis of the results has revealed that a situational assessment placing the conflict in the category of threat is connected with the aggressive coping strategy in young people in situations of social conflict. It should be concluded that a situational assessment of a conflict as threat intensifies the aggressive coping strategy in adolescents in a situation of social conflict. It can be suspected that young people who find themselves in a situation of social conflict and who assess it as a threat will apply an aggressive strategy in order to cope with this situation (Ratajczak, 1996). This tendency appears to be consistent with the statement by L. Berkowitz (1992) according to which aggression is generated as a result of perceived threat, a conviction that one is an object of intentional, wrongful treatment, and a violation of an individual's sense of self-worth.



The factor responsible for perception of a situation of conflict – and, in consequence, for its interpretation – is the sense of the locus of control. The performed analysis indicates that conflicts in relationships with others which appear in a socially organized system of an adolescent's activity are forms of behaviour that usually coincide with the sense of an external locus of control. A stronger conviction of others' influence on the positive and/or negative consequences of one's actions (external locus of control) increases the likelihood of application of the aggressive coping strategy in adolescents in social conflict. It should be concluded that lack of faith in one's ability to obtain the desired outcomes of one's actions increases the likelihood of using negative coping strategies by adolescents in social conflict situations. Moreover, lack of the ability to accept responsibility for one's failures – on the contrary, a tendency to blame one's environment for the consequence of one's unfavourable experiences – may have an intensifying effect on conflicts. This suggests that young people who apply aggressive coping strategies in social conflict situations do not believe that their actions could result in outcomes that they desire, instead attributing the positive outcomes to favourable circumstances or the kindness of other people; they are also unable to accept responsibility for their failures, whose causes they also see in external factors which they cannot influence (such as misfortune or other people's malice). Since they are usually convinced that they are unable to change the situation of social conflict, they do not concentrate on the source of the problem, but on themselves, focusing on defending the threatened "self". As a result, a defense strategy is applied, in the form of aggressive coping in social conflict; the mechanism is reinforced by frequent application in other similar circumstances (Rostowska, 2001; Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Deming, Lochman, 2008; Breet, Mayburgh, Poggenpoel, 2010).

The aggressive coping strategy in adolescents in social conflict has its roots in the family environment. The experiences from the household in which an individual was raised are among the most significant causes for the development of the aggressive coping strategy in adolescents in situations of social conflict. These experiences include, among others, the parental attitudes towards the adolescent child. An analysis of the obtained results has revealed the significance of rejection by the mother in forming the aggressive coping strategy in social conflict in adolescent girls and boys. The reports about the daughters' and sons' relationships with their mothers suggest that they see their mothers as emotionally cold, hostile, depriving them of their emotional needs, avoiding interaction with them, unaware of their problems, and uninterested in what they do. The adolescent child's attempts to lessen the emotional distance between them and the mother are received negatively. Interaction with the mother is not a source of pleasure, warmth, and satisfaction for the child. It is difficult to ignore the fact that an increase in application of the aggressive coping strategy in an adolescent in social conflict is directly connected with the degree of their emotional frustration (in particular when the needs for love and acceptance, cooperation and connection with the close relatives, and security are not satisfied) (Brzozowski, 1988; Pufal-Struzik, 1997; Bishop, 2000; Wolińska, 2000; Plopa, 1983, 2007; Poraj, 2002; Bares et al., 2011; Batool, 2013; Wałęcka-Matyja, 2013, Liberska et al., 2013). This indicates that emotional rejection by the mother causes in an adolescent child a state of anxiety and hostility, reduced by aggression. It may therefore appear that young people who do not experience, during their ontogenetic development, open and warm relationship with their mother, are unable to function rationally in interpersonal relationships, in particular in social conflict. These adolescent tend to have a negative image of the social

environment, which they perceive as threatening and hostile. The methods of coping with the hostility that they apply manifest themselves as an ease to enter conflicts and aggressive behaviour tendency.

Studies have shown that mothers of girls who apply aggressive coping strategies perceive themselves as an authority in all matters connected with their adolescent daughter. Dominating behaviour can be observed, as well as a tendency to control the daughter's life and shape it according to the mother's own standards and demands, without taking into consideration the daughter's opinion. The mother does not try to understand the daughter's thoughts and feelings; she introduces strict rules and demands absolute obedience. Thus, she is characterized by domination, despotism, and disregard of the daughter's opinions. The rigid model of upbringing means she strictly enforces obedience in the daughter and does not tolerate criticism or disobedience. She has a perfectionist attitude towards assessment of the way he daughter performs her tasks and duties, without consideration for her limitations. She accepts only those activities which are in accordance with her opinions and expectations. This attitude collides with the adolescent daughter's needs, in particular with the need for autonomy, independence, and co-decision. It also generates conflict between the need for independence (achieved, or soon to be achieved sexual maturity and an increase in intellectual capacity) in the teenager and the limitations imposed by the mother. Constant criticism drives the adolescent girl to rebellion and contesting the mother's authority. Moreover, all punishments applied by the mother are treated as a form of aggression against the daughter; in this way, aggression becomes a model of behaviour which becomes reinforced as a habit of reacting aggressively to other people's behaviour, objects, or conflict situations (Ranchburg, 1993; Pufal-Struzik, 1997; Ratzke et al., 1997; Wolińska, 2000; Łukaszewicz, 2002; Poraj, 2002; Guskowska, 2004; Liberska et al., 2013).

The conducted analysis has shown that the mother's attitude towards the son, as perceived by boys using the aggressive coping strategy in conflict, is variable. It depends on the momentary mood and personal problems, not necessarily connected with family life (*inconsistent attitude*). As can be seen, lack of consistency can be observed in mothers whose demands do not have an objective character, but are based on subjective causes, such as good or bad mood. The "internal" emotional state of the mother is transferred to the relationship with the son. Excessive emotional distance, hostility, ignoring the son's problems, frequent shouting, imposing limitations and punishments is combined with behaviour where the mother initiates emotional contact, accepts the son, and expresses interest in his problems. It is worth to observe the polarity, with emotional distance on one side, and emotional involvement on the other. It suggests an imbalanced attitude of the mother towards the adolescent child, which can have a harmful effect on the development of mechanisms of emotional control in the teenage boy, as a result of which he may have a tendency to spontaneously express his emotions and needs. An experience of lack of emotional stability (involvement and emotional distance) in the relationship with mother forms a strong frustrating factor which may cause the adolescent boy, in a situation of social conflict, to display an increased level of hostility and aggression (cf. Plopa, 1983; Kobak, Sceery, 1988; Obuchowska, 2001; Liberska et al., 2013).

It can generally be stated that a young person's cognitive reaction to social conflict may have impact on their choice of the coping strategy. The adolescent's conviction of the influence of others on the positive and negative outcomes of events in a situation of conflict increases the likelihood of application of the aggressive coping strat-

egy. The teenager who chooses the aggressive coping strategy in a situation of social conflict does not believe that they may achieve the desired outcomes of their own actions and instead, attributes them to favourable circumstances or other people's goodwill; they are also unable to accept responsibility for their own failures and sees them as caused by external factors (such as misfortune or other people's malice) which are beyond their control. Moreover, if a situation of social conflict is perceived in terms of threat, the young person is more likely to choose the aggressive strategy. Thus, it can be suspected that an adolescent who assesses a situation of social conflict as threat and who believes they cannot control the situation will apply aggressive coping mechanisms which may free him – if only for a short period of time – from the unpleasant emotional tension, but are not oriented towards solving the problem and overcoming the difficulties. It is difficult not to notice that the teenager's tendency to react aggressively to the negative emotions caused by social conflict shape inappropriate parental attitudes towards their adolescent child. An emotional distance, lack of balanced emotional bond, a raised bar of demands, and severe punishments are determinants which seem to form an individual who copes with situations of social conflict in an aggressive manner. This indicates that an adolescent child who does not experience in their family environment acceptance and openness to their problems does not cope rationally with conflict situations.

To conclude, it is difficult not to notice that the selected personality and family variables are not strong predictors of the aggressive coping strategy in youth in situations of social conflict; this means that there may exist relatively numerous other variables which co-determine the level of aggressive coping strategy in adolescents in situations of social conflict.

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