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Aggressive strategy for coping with a social conflict situation by adolescents: Psychosocial conditions

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to search for personality and family predictors of adolescents' strategy for aggressive coping with a social conflict situation. The empirical research was carried out on 893 adolescents (468 girls and 425 boys) aged 13 to 15. The research results show that the evaluation of a conflict as a threat, a higher evaluation of physical properties in a young person, a strong belief in the influence of others on positive and negative effects of events, and responding with anger in interpersonal situations posing a threat to "I" coincide with the aggressive strategy for adolescents' coping with a social conflict situation. Moreover, the analysis of the research results shows that the adolescents' aggressive way of reacting to emotional tension, which occurs in a social conflict situation, results from an inappropriate attitude in their upbringing that is characterized by a parent's emotional distance toward an adolescent child and the aggressive model of parents' reacting to a conflict.

KEYWORDS: youth, personality, family aggressive coping strategy, conflict

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is an important stage in everybody's life, a transitional moment from childhood to adulthood. It is the time of numerous developmental changes, beginning with alterations in external appearance related to puberty, which occurs at the age of 13 to 15 (Harwas-Napierała, Trempała, 2000). During this period, adolescents' gradual "growing into" adult society begins, as well as changes in social relations with adults and peers (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2003). Young people expand their social world and attain more freedom and independence while making decisions in different areas of behavior, increasing the probability of the occurrence of conflicts (Jackson et al., 1998). In social contacts, there appear conflicts with teachers; disputes with school peers and with girlfriends or boyfriends; and arguments with one or both parents and other family members (Jaworski, 2000; Miłkowska, 2012; Obuchowska, 2010; Polak, 2010; Róžańska-Kowal, 2004; Smetana and Daddis, 2002). The areas of most conflict in the student-teacher relationship are school grades, a teacher's tactless behavior, domineering attitude, and rigidity of requirements. On the other hand, the main reasons for peer conflicts are provocation, betrayal, indiscretion, rivalry over grades, gaining favor with the opposite sex, power over the class, and prestige in sports. Most of the problems in mutual understanding between parents and children result from the change in adolescents' attitudes toward their parents. Young people are less open toward their parents, while parents often fail to cope with their adolescent children's growing autonomy and try to limit it. Many conflicts with parents involve everyday situations – differences in tastes and opinions about academic performance, clothing, music, watching television, computer use, how leisure time is spent or coming home late at night.

A situation of conflict with another human being constitutes one of the basic social situations in every person's life. The word "conflict," derived from the Latin *confligere*, *conflictatio*, means striking together – a dispute, discussion, fight, or collision of two or more processes or forces characteristic of living creatures. In the context of interpersonal relationships, a conflict situation presents a certain kind of interaction between partners in which they clearly recognize their different interests, needs or aspirations (Balawajder, 2010). A social conflict situation, which falls into the category of difficult situations of social interactions, accompanies man in all periods of his

life. From the moment of birth, every human being must learn to cope with difficulties and challenges. A difficult situation stimulates a young person to work toward achieving a balance between demands and possibilities and/or the improvement of the emotional condition. The activity man undertakes in a difficult situation is analyzed in a specific situational context as a strategy for coping with a current difficult situation (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000). It is worth pointing out how young people cope with conflict situations at school, in relationships with peers or in the family home.

Previous research results show that the school environment is particularly stressful for adolescents, especially conflict situations with teachers and schoolmates. The empirical material contained in literature shows that young people use many different strategies to cope with school problems (Miłkowska, 2012; Różanska-Kowal, 2004). Most often they are behaviors that control emotions. Fewer young people aimed to overwork a problem, make an analysis and try to change the situation. Among the coping strategies mentioned by young people who experience difficult situations at school we can distinguish aggressive behaviors toward people and objects. Subject classes and breaks between them are particularly common times for aggressive methods of relieving stress.

Conflict situations with parents constitute an increasingly important source of tension as adolescents grow up. Conflicts in child-parent relationships are common during adolescence period (Jaworski, 2000). Older schoolchildren (adolescents) are eager to be released from their parents' custody, and in all spheres of their behavior they demand more rights than ever before. The obstacles and failures they encounter, as well as parental restrictions and bans, cause anger, expressed in arrogant responses, door slams, sometimes crying, or direct attacks of aggression toward objects or people (Lachowska, 2010).

The observations above show that a social conflict situation is connected with the issue of the strategy for aggressive coping with a specific situational context, aimed at avoiding or minimizing tensions, losses and disadvantageous results. Why do young people choose an aggressive strategy for coping with a social conflict situation? To answer this question, it is helpful to refer to the concept of a psychological mechanism of human behavior in difficult situations by Tyszkowa (1986). Cognitive schemes play an important role. They determine the processes of perceiving an external situation, as well as the emotional reflection of the significance of this situation by the subject. They also determine the course of one's own actions and a set of habits in responding to emotional tension, which occurs in a given situation and was shaped in particular upbringing conditions.

A human being's activity in a difficult situation depends to a large extent on his or her evaluation of the situation. A difficult situation that interferes with the current course of activities, hinders, threatens or prevents a person from meeting his or her needs may be assessed as a damage/loss, a threat and a challenge (Włodarczyk and Wrześniewski, 2005). The individual's evaluation of an event influences that individual's decisions regarding possibilities of taking action to eliminate the causes of a difficult situation, or at least to mitigate its consequences, referred to as a remedial strat-

egy (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000; Scherer et al., 1994; Winstok, 2007). The data obtained by Domińska-Werbel (2014) show that adolescents who use aggressive strategies for coping with difficult social situations are characterized by a higher intensity of the situational and dispositional cognitive evaluation of a difficult situation as harm/loss. Kowalski, Crocker and Hoar (2005) found out that subjects who assessed the difficult situation as a threat applied mainly emotional coping mechanisms. All their effort was directed toward reducing the unpleasant tension caused by violently taking it out on others and/or activating defense mechanisms rather than looking for a real solution to the problem. Thus, people who are more likely to evaluate (situationally and dispositionally) a difficult situation as a harm/loss as well as a threat reveal aggression, hyperactivity or rebellion in their behaviors.

The way people perceive the world – along with their attitudes and expectations toward themselves, other people, tasks and results of their own activities – defines the method of cognitive and emotional perception and interpretation of a difficult situation. A set of concepts and ideas about oneself and expectations toward oneself, which form the structure of “I,” performs a significant role in human behavior in difficult situations (Tyszkowa, 1986). Information about oneself and the characteristics of self-knowledge constitute a premise for assessing one’s own abilities in difficult situations. To the best of the author’s knowledge, self-esteem constitutes an assessing and estimating component of the structure of “I”. Its influence is revealed in an individual’s functioning in difficult situations. Low (adequate, inadequate) or high (inadequate) self-esteem plays an unfavorable role in the behavior of a young person in difficult situations (Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Ostrowsky, 2010; Turner and White, 2015). When an individual is confronted with difficulties, inadequate self-esteem leads to an increase of a sense of personal danger, the growth of negative emotions, and progressive disorganization of behavior. Low self-esteem, one’s own possibilities and effectiveness in the face of various difficult events, are conducive to the occurrence of aggressive behaviors. Similarly, in the case of high self-esteem (inadequate), a tendency to take aggressive reactions out on others may be observed. Difficult situations may cause uncontrollable aggression in people with low or high (inadequate) self-esteem.

An individual’s functioning in difficult situations is determined by a subjective conviction regarding the possibility of having control over the situation (Tyszkowa, 1986). People differ in the way they see a situation in which they are to act. Some tend to perceive most situations as such, seeing a large influence of uncontrolled factors on the results of their activities and thus perceiving themselves as “not in control of the situation.” Others tend to perceive situations as such in which the results of their activities depend on them, and thus perceive themselves as those “who control the situation” (Krasowicz and Kurzyp-Wojnarska, 1990). This means the individual’s subjective convictions regarding his or her control of the surrounding world are an important variable that regulates the process of coping with a difficult situation and influences the undertaken coping strategies. Research by Borecka-Biernat (2006) and Kurtek (2005) shows that people who lack confidence in the ability to influence

positive results of their own actions tend to be aggressive. Rostowska (2001) also found that conflicting relationships between young people and others (e.g. mutual reluctance, unfriendliness, blaming one another) were forms of behavior that most often co-occur with a sense of external control. Hence, these individuals were more susceptible to conflicting behaviors. As may be seen, evaluating the situation in which a person is not convinced that he or she can control it is connected with an aggressive form of coping with problems.

The conflict situation, an immanent element of social interactions, creates strong emotional tension with a negative tinge. Continuous emotional excitement with high intensity and a negative tinge constitutes the basis for aggressive behaviors, irritation and outbursts of rage (Gross et al., 2013; Winstok, 2007). The kind of emotions that lead to aggressive behaviors correspond to a sequence of irritability-anger-wrath. It is worth noticing that anger is among the possible negative emotional reactions that occur when experiencing a stressful situation perceived as a threat or a loss/harm (Domińska-Werbel, 2014). According to Berkowitz (1992), anger and wrath trigger actions aimed at recovering endangered or lost goals of actions and then lead to aggressive behaviors. In addition, Różańska-Kowal (2004), as a result of the research conducted, states that a tendency to react with anger is connected with fighting and not giving up in difficult situations.

In turn, emotions in the sequence apprehension-anxiety-fear generally lead to retreat and escape (Borecka-Biernat, Ciuladiene, 2015). It seems that under natural conditions anger is the emotion that facilitates fighting, whereas fear facilitates escape. Nevertheless, observations show that when a person has nowhere to run away and there is no other possibility except aggression or attack, then anxiety may be the reason for the attack. Ranschurg (1993) point out to the co-occurrence of the apprehension-aggression reaction. Thus, aggression is an effective form of coping with anxiety in social situations. This reaction helps relieve the anxiety tension or hide apprehension.

The strategy for aggressive coping with a difficult social situation constitutes the form of behavior acquired in accordance with general principles of learning. The methods of perceiving obstacles and the ways of behaviors in difficult social situations, including conflicts, depend to a large extent on the habits of reacting to difficulties that developed in the process of upbringing. The system of emotional attitudes between parents and a child has a considerable influence on that child's social development; it becomes a prototype of social coexistence and solving difficult social situations for the child (Tyszkowa, 1986). In source literature (Liberska et al., 2013; Poraj, 2002; Wolińska, 2013) may be found evidence that aggressive forms of a child's responses to difficult social situations result from inappropriate upbringing attitudes that boil down to the following: 1. *attitudes of excessive distance*, 2. *excessive requirements*, 3. *excessive protection* and 4. *inconsistency*. Parents' incorrect behavior results in not meeting the child's significant needs, in particular the need for close emotional contact, the atmosphere of parental love and a sense of security. It is believed that a person who lacks social security, when in a state of threat and anxiety connected

with the sphere of interpersonal contacts, launches a strategy for aggressive coping with a difficult situation that is aimed at protecting an overloaded regulatory system.

In many difficult situations, the behavior of man depends not only on the characteristics of the situation itself to which he or she is supposed to respond to, but also on the behavior of other people in the same situation. The environment that creates natural conditions for learning how to respond to difficult situations is family, and parents are often the child's first models of specific strategies for coping with difficulties. The research shows that most children come from families in which one or both parents are aggressive (Narayan et al., 2015; Obuchowska, 2001; Wolińska, 2013). Aggressive forms of behavior in children's conflicts manifest family conflicts that are a negative pattern for children in this regard. In families in which frequent arguments, vulgar expressions and fights occur, where objects are destroyed or thrown, and where doors are slammed, a child adopts these behaviors and not only uses them in contacts with parents and siblings, but also transfers them to school, behaves arrogantly toward teachers, shows aggression in peer relationships, and learns to solve conflicts by using force, especially when the child observes these aggressive behaviors to have a favorable effect. Aggressive behaviors are transmitted when a child takes such forms of behavior from the family environment and treats them as effective methods to cope with a social conflict situation.

To sum up: the concept of the psychological mechanism of human behavior in difficult situations, presented by Tyszkowa (1986), allows us to describe some personality and family conditions of the aggressive strategy used by young people in a social conflict situation. However, in these conditions we should look for determinants of the aggressive coping strategies applied by young people in situations of social conflict.

THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The empirical research focused on personality and family conditions of the strategy for aggressive coping with a social conflict situation by young people, with particular emphasis on the role of the cognitive evaluation type of a social conflict situation; the level of self-esteem; the sense of control; the level and content of emotions; upbringing attitudes of parents, and a model of parental response to a social conflict situation.

The study aimed to answer the following research question:

What group of personality and family variables is related to the fact that strategies of aggression used by young people are intensified in a social conflict situation?

Thus formulated, the research question makes it possible to put forward this hypothesis, which is presented below and will be verified by the analysis of the results of the empirical studies:

The strategy for aggressive coping with a social conflict situation by adolescents is connected with the evaluation of a conflict situation as a threat or as a harm/loss; a low or a high level of general self-esteem; a sense of external control; a high level

of negative emotions (anger, apprehension) and perception of parental attitudes as inappropriate; and the presented model of the aggressive coping strategy used by parents (one or both) in a social conflict situation.

RESEARCH METHOD

Subjects and the course of research. A group of 893 adolescents – 468 girls and 425 boys – aged 13 to 15 were examined. The respondents were first-, second- and third-year junior high school students. All respondents participated in the research voluntarily and anonymously, while the research was carried out in accordance with the principles of psychological research. The basic criterion for selecting the students was the age level. The influence of age on the selection of strategies for aggressive coping with a social conflict situation was analyzed in the group of 13-to-15-year-olds (subperiod of early adolescence). Adolescence is an important stage in the life of every human being, a transitional phase from childhood and adulthood. It is also considered a period of rebellion and pressure. There are many biological, psychic, mental and motivational changes as well as changes in social attitudes, with the result that young people often have many problems adapting their behavior to new situations, tasks and social roles (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz 2003).

Research tools. Stress Evaluation Questionnaire (KOS) by Włodarczyk and Wrześniewski (2010); Self-Esteem Scale (SES) by Rosenberg in the adaptation by Łaguna, Lachowicz-Tabaczek and Dzwonkowska (2007); Questionnaire for Testing a Sense of Control (KBPK) by Krasowicz and Kurzyp-Wojnarska (1990); Three-Factor State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (TISCO) by Spielberger and Wrześniewski (TISCO) (Wrześniewski, 1991); Parental Attitude Scale (SPR) by Plopa (2007); “Aggressive Coping With a Social Conflict Situation” Scale from the questionnaire to study parents’ strategies for coping with a social conflict situation in the child’s perception (SRwSK) (Borecka-Biernat, 2013); and “Aggressive Coping With a Social Conflict Situation” Scale from the questionnaire to study strategies for coping with a social conflict situation by young people (KSMK) (Borecka-Biernat, 2012).

Stress Assessment Questionnaire (KOS) by Włodarczyk and Wrześniewski (2010) contains 35 (including 23 diagnostic) adjectives describing stress situations. It has two versions that include the same sets of adjective terms but differ in the instructions given to the subjects. In version A (measurement of the situational stress assessment), subjects are asked to indicate a specific difficult situation that took place during the last week. (In the described study, it was a social conflict situation.) Version B (measurement of the dispositional stress assessment) contains an instruction in which subjects are asked to indicate to what extent the given adjectives are consistent with what they most often experience in difficult situations (in the described study, a social conflict situation). KOS consists of six subscales that are indicators of particular types of stress assessment: threat-state, threat-trait, harm/loss-state, harm/loss-trait, challenge-state and challenge-trait. The “threat” subscales contain 10 items, the “challenge” subscale 6, and the ‘harm/loss’ subscale 4. The questionnaire is characterized

by satisfactory criterion accuracy and reliability (Cronbach's α internal consistency coefficient for version A is .76-.90, for version B it is .79-.90).

The Self-esteem Scale (SES) by Rosenberg in the adaptation of Laguna, Lachowicz-Tabaczek and Dzwonkowska (2007) gives the opportunity to calculate the overall (global) self-esteem level in both adolescents and adults. SES consists of 10 diagnostic descriptive statements about oneself, by means of which the subject makes a description of his or her own "I." The Polish version of the SES method is a reliable tool (Cronbach's α coefficient in various studies ranges from .81 to .83) and has a proved theoretical validity.

The Questionnaire for Testing Locus of Control (KBPK) by Krasowicz and Kurzyp-Wojnarska (1990) measures the personality variable called a sense of placing control and described in Rotter's theory of social learning (1966). It consists of 46 questions with a forced choice; 36 of them are diagnostic items, and the remaining 10 are buffer questions. Diagnostic questions concern simple situations from the lives of students and form two scales: Scale of successes (S) and Scale of failures (P). The sum of the results obtained on the scale of successes and the scale of failures creates an indicator of the generalized locus of control (S + P). Low results in questionnaire KBPK indicate a sense of external control, while high results indicate a sense of internal control. The questionnaire is characterized by satisfactory reliability (coefficient of internal consistency KR-20 for scale S is .54, and for scale P is .69) and criterion accuracy.

Three-Factor State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (TISCO) is a Polish adaptation of the American State-Trait Personality Inventory (STPI) test developed by Spielberger's team (Wrześniewski, 1991). TISCO consists of two independent parts. The first part (SPI) is designed to measure apprehension, anger and curiosity, which are treated as emotional states and experienced at a given moment. The second part (TPI) is used to study the same emotions, which are treated as personality traits. Thus, the test contains six subscales: apprehension as a state, apprehension as a trait, anger as a state, anger as a trait, curiosity as a state, and curiosity as a trait. Each of the subscales consists of 10 short, simple statements referring to an individual's subjective feelings. The reliability results (Cronbach's α internal coefficient is .82 to .92 for the first part (SPI) and .68 to .88 for the second part (TPI). TISCO's diagnostic validity is satisfactory and close to the original version of STPI.

Parental Attitude Scale (SPR) by Plopa (2007) is used to examine parental attitudes as perceived by children. It includes 75 statements in the "My Mother" version and in the "My Father" version. The questionnaire consists of 5 scales, each of which contains 15 statements: Attitude of Acceptance-Rejection, Attitude of Autonomy, Overprotecting Attitude, Overdemanding Attitude and Attitude of Inconsistency. The questionnaire is characterized by satisfactory theoretical accuracy and reliability (Cronbach's α internal consistency coefficient for "My Mother" is .81 to .92, for "My Father" .79 to .92)

Questionnaire SRwSK by Borecka-Biernat (2013) consists of two versions, "My Mother" and "My Father." It is intended for studying parents' coping strategies in

a social conflict situation, as perceived by their adolescent children. The tool includes descriptions of 16 social conflict situations in each version. Each situation was given four behaviors expressing parents' coping with a social conflict situation in their child's perception; aggressive coping (A), avoiding coping (U), submissive coping (UI) and o task-oriented coping (Z) with a social conflict situation. For the purpose of this research, the scale of aggressive coping (A) of mother/father with a social conflict situation in the perception of the child was applied. The questionnaire is characterized by satisfactory diagnostic accuracy and reliability. (Cronbach's α internal consistency coefficient for both versions is around or above .70.)

Questionnaire KSMK by Borecka-Biernat (2012) is designed to study coping strategies by adolescents in a social conflict situation. It consists of descriptions of 33 social conflict situations. To each situation, four behaviors expressing coping with a social conflict situation were given: aggressive coping (A), avoiding coping (U), submissive coping (UI), and task-oriented coping with a social conflict situation ('Z'). For the needs of this research, the scale of aggressive coping (A) with a social conflict situation by young people was applied. The questionnaire is characterized by good reliability (Cronbach's α internal consistency coefficient is around or above .70) and diagnostic accuracy.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

Because of many explanatory variables, regression in the hierarchical variant was used. The tool applied was the method of regression (criterion: probability of F-removal ≥ 100). The method consists of introducing all potential predictors to the model, then successively removing insignificant variables, followed by recalculation of the model until the final form is obtained (Bedyńska, Książek 2012). . An analysis was carried out on the results for the whole group, with separate analyses by sex. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Stepwise multiple regression for the result of scale Aggression (A) KSMK with respect to scales KOS, scale SES, scales KBPK, scales TISCO, scales SPR, and scale Aggression (A) SRwSK; results for the whole group (N=893) as well as for girls (N=468) and boys (N=425)

Respondents	Variable	Beta	B	Standard error (st.)	t	Level p<
Total	Threat-state	.07	.06	.02	2.64	.008
	Success	-.16	-.23	.04	-5.44	<.001
	Anger-state	.09	.06	.02	2.88	.004
	Anger-trait	.18	.13	.03	5.17	<.001
	Anxiety-trait	-.13	-.12	.03	-3.85	<.001
	A-R Mother	-.12	-.05	.02	-4.19	<.001
	'A' Mother	.34	.69	.06	11.32	<.001
	'A' Father	.11	.22	.06	3.78	<.001
	Free Ind.		6.60	1.17	5.63	<.001
Multiple correlation coefficient: R=.60						
Multiple determination coefficient: R ² =.36						
Equation significance: F(8.884)=6.78; p<.00001						
Estimation standard error (std.): 3.75						
Girls	Threat-state	.10	.08	.03	2.85	.005
	Self-Esteem	.10	.10	.04	2.79	.006
	Success	-.11	-.16	.06	-2.49	.010
	Failure	-.10	-.15	.06	-2.31	.020
	Anger-state	.19	.14	.03	4.18	<.001
	Anxiety-state	-.16	-.21	.06	-3.48	<.001
	A-R Mother	-.08	-.03	.02	-2.17	.030
	'A' Mother '	.43	.82	.08	1.84	<.001
	'A' Father	.11	.22	.08	2.89	.004
	Free Ind.		6.18	1.96	3.15	.002
Multiple correlation coefficient: R=.66						
Multiple determination coefficient: R ² =.43						
Equation significance: F(9.458)=38.31; p<.00001						
Estimation standard error (std.): 3.54						
Boys	Success	-.15	-.22	.07	-3.40	<.001
	Anger-trait	.19	.14	.03	4.27	<.001
	A-R Mother	-.17	-.07	.02	-3.84	<.001
	'A' Mother	.26	.57	.10	5.74	<.001
	'A' Father	.11	.21	.09	2.32	.020
	Free Ind.		7.44	1.59	4.68	<.001
Multiple correlation coefficient: R=.54						
Multiple determination coefficient: R ² =.30						
Equation significance: F(5.419)=35.18; p<.00001						
Estimation standard error (std.): 3.90						

Note: A-R Attitude of Acceptance-Rejection, 'A' Aggressive coping with a social conflict situation

The first analysis was carried out on the results of the whole group, regardless of gender. As can be seen in Table 1, eight predictors had a significant influence on the strategy of aggressive coping with a social conflict situation by adolescents. They

accounted for 36% of the variance in using the discussed strategy, and the described model is characterized by matching [$F(8, 884)=60,78$; $p<.00001$]. The remaining predictors were not significant determinants of the frequency of using aggressive strategy. Directional *beta* coefficients show that the increase in frequency in the use of aggressive strategy is influenced by a higher level of situational conflict evaluation as a threat; a stronger conviction about external control in situations of successes; a higher level of anger understood as a temporary emotional state; and a higher level of the learned disposition to respond with anger. Also influential were a lower level of disposition to react with apprehension; a higher level of maternal attitudes full of emotional coldness, disapproval, hostility and rejection of a child; and a higher level of aggressive coping strategies of mother and father in a social conflict situation.

Separate analyses were carried out for groups divided by gender (see Table 1). The stepwise multiple regression analysis showed that out of 27 independent variables introduced into the regression model, nine were of great significance in explaining girls' strategies of aggressive coping. They accounted for 43% of the variance in the use of the discussed strategy, and the described model is characterized by good matching [$F(9,458)=38,31$; $p<.00001$]. Other remaining monitored indicators did not show any statistically significant dependencies with the strategy of aggression in girls. It turns out that the more the current conflict situation is evaluated in the category of threat, the higher the level of self-esteem; the stronger the conviction of external control separately for situations of successes and situations of failures; the higher the level of anger of a situational character; the lower the level of apprehension understood as a temporary emotional state. In addition, the higher the level of the mother's attitude filled with emotional coldness, disapproval, hostility and rejection of a daughter; and the higher the level of aggressive coping of mother and father in a social conflict situation, the more often the girls use strategies of aggression in a social conflict situation.

The study verified which set of personality variables influenced the level of the strategy for aggressive coping with a social conflict situation by boys. Five independent variables turned out to be significant in the regression equation. The discussed model proved to match the data well [$F(5,419)=35,18$; $p<.00001$] and accounted for 30% of the dependent variable variance. Other variables included in the research turned out to be insignificant determinants of strategies of aggression in the group of boys. Standardized *beta* coefficients reveal that aggressive coping strategy used by boys is influenced by a stronger conviction about the sense of external control related to situations of successes; a higher level of anger understood as a relatively constant personality trait; a higher level of the mother's attitude filled with with emotional coldness, disapproval, hostility and rejection; and a higher level of aggressive coping strategies for mother and father in a social conflict situation.

In the light of the statistical verification, it should be concluded that the adopted personality and family variables partially confirmed the validity of the hypothesis.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The analysis of the research findings reveals that a situational evaluation that defines a conflict as a threat is connected with the strategy for aggressive coping with a social conflict situation by young people. It is important to believe that a teenager in a social conflict situation who defines it as a threat will use the strategy of aggression to cope (Domińska-Werbel, 2014). This tendency seems to be consistent with Berkowitz's contention (1992) that aggression arises in a human being as a result of a perceived threat or a conviction that he or she is the object of intentional, inappropriate treatment, or violation of one's own self-esteem.

The research results presented here also show that the level of self-esteem plays a certain role in choosing the strategy for aggressive coping with a social conflict situation. The aggressive strategy is accompanied by a higher level of global self-esteem. It should be emphasized that global self-esteem correlates with self-esteem on detailed dimensions such as intellectual abilities, social abilities, physical fitness or life resourcefulness; however, it is neither empirically nor conceptually identical (Marsch, 1996, after: Łaguna, Lachowicz-Tabaczek and Dzwonkowska, 2007). Therefore, it may be expected that in interpersonal relations, people who prefer the strategy of aggression in social conflict must possess a certain level of faith in their strength and abilities. Considering the fact that their activities are aimed at achieving their goals in a determined manner and without taking into account the interest of the other participants of the conflict-their confidence may sometimes be evaluated as higher than others'. In particular, adolescent girls are aware of their abilities and limitations that affect their way of functioning in a social conflict situation. They better evaluate aspects of their own "I," which are directly connected with the attitude toward their own appearance and physical characteristics. It may be assumed that for girls who are physically fit, the strategy of aggression becomes more effective in coping with a social conflict situation, and therefore has a chance of being strengthened because of its instrumental value (Wojciszke, 2000).

In the course of the analysis, it was stated that conflicting relationships with others (e.g. mutual reluctance, malevolence, blaming one Nother), which appear in the socially organized system of activities of young PEOPLE, constitute forms of behavior that most often occur along with a sense of external control. A stronger belief in the influence of others on positive and or negative effects of one's own actions (external control) is conducive to the intensification of the strategy for aggressive coping. Thus, it seems probable that the lack of faith in the ability to achieve desired results of one's own actions or the unwillingness to accept responsibility for failures are conducive to the disclosure of the strategy of aggression in a social conflict situation by young people. Since they are most likely to believe they cannot influence the change of a social conflict situation, they focus not on the source of the problem but on themselves, and decide to defend their own "I," which is in danger. This results in adapting a defense strategy in the form of aggressive responses to a social conflict situation and reinforcing it by its routine application in this situation. This finding is

consistent with the research results obtained by Halloran et al. (1999) and Rostowska (2001).

It is worth noting that young people who use the strategy of aggression in a social conflict situation exhibit a higher level of anger as an emotional state, which they experience in connection with this situation, and a higher level of learned disposition to respond with anger. This means the higher the intensification of the strategy of aggression for coping with a social conflict situation by young people, the higher the level of anger with a differentiated genesis (state, trait). Research by Borecka-Biernat and Ciuladiene (2015), as well as by Domińska-Werbel (2014), obtained similar results. It is interesting that a high level of apprehension with a differentiated genesis (state, trait) did not turn out to be a determinant of the aggressive strategy. This result seems to be in line with the conclusion formulated by Tyszkowa (1986), who said an individual's personality structure and traits determine the way the emotional tension generated in a difficult situation will be understood, i.e. as information and compensation in relation to the purpose of the action, or as a personal threat signal.

Moreover, the analysis of the research results revealed the role of the rejecting maternal attitude in shaping the aggressive strategy. If a mother, because of her open reluctance toward her child, brutally rejects attempts of the child's emotional approach, avoids contact with her child and neglects her child's emotional needs, the child does not experience open and warm relationships with a significant person in the ontogenetic development. Rejection by the mother causes a state of strong apprehension and anxiety that connected with hostility. Anxiety and hostility are reduced by aggression, resistance, negativism, withdrawal, passivity and apathy (Borecka-Biernat, 2006). It should be noted that the way a child reacts to rejection depends on, among other things, models and norms functioning in the family. Moreover, the lack of a satisfying bond with the mother leads a child to define the surroundings and the world as unfriendly, threatening and untrustworthy which leads the child to focus on himself or herself, to self-defend and to react to experienced frustration, inter alia, by defending the "I" in the form of impulsive, often aggressive behaviors (Liberska et al., 2013; Poraj, 2002; Wolińska, 2013).

The analysis concluded that parents who are perceived as using strategies based on aggression in situations that impede the pursuit of the target contribute to the modeling of the child's aggressive behaviors in a social conflict situation (Narayan et al., 2015; Obuchowska, 2001; Rostowska, 2001; Wolińska, 2013). Parents provide their adolescent children with aggressive models of responses to conflict. Daughters and sons learn these models by observing the behavior of their mothers and fathers in conditions in which the realization of their own pursuits is in danger. Young people adopt aggressive forms of behavior from the family environment and treat them as effective methods to solve problems, achieve goals or cope with conflict. It is worth paying attention to the opposite-gender parent's preference for impacts that are conducive to the aggressive coping strategy used by adolescent girls and boys. The sociocultural theory of identification states that the personality traits of a parent with whom children identify influence their socialization of boys and girls,

not only the gender identity of the model and the person identifying with it (Rychlak, Legerski, 1967).

To generalize the results obtained, a young person's cognitive attitude toward a social conflict situation may affect the choice of a remedial strategy. When a social conflict situation is perceived as a threat, an adolescent more often uses the strategy of aggression. It should also be noted that young people who use aggressive strategies for coping with a social conflict situation evaluate the aspects of their own "I" that relate to their physical characteristics much higher. It may be assumed that the strategy of aggression in people with fit bodies becomes more effective when coping with difficult situations, and therefore it has a chance of being strengthened because of its instrumental value. A strong conviction of young people about the influence of others on positive and/or negative effects of events performs a role in choosing aggressive strategy. This shows that young people who choose the aggressive strategy for coping with a social conflict situation have no conviction about the possibility of achieving desired results of their own actions; rather, they attribute them to the successful combination of events or the favor of other people and cannot take responsibility for failures when they see the reasons in other external factors on which they have no influence, such as bad fate or malice of other people. Therefore, the evaluation of a conflict situation a young person may feel unable to control is connected with the aggressive form of coping with this situation. Bear in mind that an individual responds emotionally to a social conflict situation and may feel anger. Hence, it may be assumed that when a conflict situation is evaluated as a threat and a young person is convinced of having no control over its course, it triggers anger, which in turn results in aggression. This strategy is used by adolescents to help control anger that appears in a situation that threatens the realization of their own pursuits. The strategy of aggression is primarily the form of coping with anger experienced in a conflict situation.

We cannot fail to notice, however, that the youth's habitual responding with aggression to negative emotions that arise from a social conflict situation is caused by an inappropriate upbringing attitude characterized by a parent's emotional distance toward an adolescent child. Mothers who, in their children's perception, use the aggressive strategy for coping with a social conflict situation are emotionally cold, do not show emotional warmth, have hostile attitudes, neglect their emotional needs, avoid contact with their adolescent child, and are not interested in their child's affairs or achievements. Intensification of the strategy of aggression in a conflict situation of girls and boys is related to the degree of frustration of their emotional needs: love and recognition, cooperation and close relations with the loved ones, security and certainty. Being rejected by the mother triggers a state of anxiety along with hostility, which is reduced by aggression. It should not be forgotten that the process of modeling performs a role in the origin of an aggressive habit of responding to negative emotions that arise from a social conflict situation. An adolescent learns an aggressive way of coping with a social conflict situation by, *inter alia*, observing parents who manifest this way of coping with a social conflict situation, as well as by frequent

contact with them, i.e. through social learning. In general, it seems to be the family home that teaches a young human being an aggressive form of coping with a social conflict situation.

To sum up, the search for personality and family conditions of aggressive strategies for coping with a social conflict situation by young people seems justified. The issue of relations between a cognitive evaluation of a social conflict, self-esteem, locus of control, emotions, parental attitudes and a model of parents' responses to a social conflict situation is a specific novelty, and as such it certainly requires many subsequent studies in the group of adolescents. It turned out that the selected personality and family variables are not strong predictors of the strategy for aggressive coping with a social conflict situation by young people, which means there may be relatively many other variables co-determining the level of their strategy for aggressive coping. In the future, it would be worthwhile to include additional internal factors and new external factors determining the behavior of a human being in a difficult situation in the classic concept by Tyszkowa (1986). However, we should not rule out that the results of these studies may prove to be the beginning of researching the as yet neglected areas of determinants of the strategy for aggressive coping with a social conflict situation by young people.

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**STRATEGIA AGRESYWNEGO RADZENIA SOBIE DORASTAJĄCEJ
MŁODZIEŻY W SYTUACJI KONFLIKTU SPOŁECZNEGO. PSYCHOSPOŁECZNE
UWARUNKOWANIA**

ABSTRAKT: Celem badań było poszukiwanie osobowościowych i rodzinnych predyktorów strategii agresywnego radzenia sobie dorastającej młodzieży w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego. Badania empiryczne przeprowadzono w szkołach gimnazjalnych. Objęły one 893 adolescentów (468 dziewcząt i 425 chłopców) w wieku 13–15 lat. Wyniki badań wskazują, że ocena sytuacji konfliktu jako zagrożenie, wyższa ocena właściwości fizycznych u młodego człowieka, silne przekonanie o wpływie innych na pozytywne i negatywne skutki zdarzeń oraz reagowanie gniewem w sytuacjach interpersonalnych stwarzających zagrożenie dla „ja”, współwystępuje ze strategią agresywnego radzenia sobie młodzieży w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego. A oprócz tego analiza wyników badań wykazała, że agresywny sposób reagowania młodzieży na napięcie emocjonalne, powstający w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego, kształtuje niewłaściwa postawa wychowawcza charakteryzująca się uczuciowym dystansem rodzica w stosunku do dorastającego dziecka oraz agresywny wzór reagowania rodziców na konflikt.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: młodzież, osobowość, rodzina, agresywna strategia radzenia sobie, konflikt

