

Avoidant coping strategies in adolescents in situations of social conflict: an attempt to identify personality and family indicators

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ABSTRACT

Goal

The purpose of the study was to determine the personality and family indicators of the avoidant coping strategy in adolescent youth in situations of social conflict

Method

The study was conducted on a sample of 893 middle school students. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) (adapted by Dzwonkowska, Lachowicz-Tabaczek and Łaguna), the Sense of Control Questionnaire (SCQ) by Krasowicz and Kurzyp-Wojnarska, the Stress Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) designed by Włodarczyk and Wrześniewski, the Three-Factor Inventory of Personality States and Traits (TIPST) by Spielberger, the Parental Attitudes Scale (PAS) Plopa, the Questionnaire for Coping Strategies in Parents in Situations of Social Conflict (QSPC) by Borecka-Biernat, and Questionnaire for Coping Strategies in Adolescents in Situations of Social Conflict (QSAC) by Borecka-Biernat were used in the study.

Results

Young people's strong conviction of other individuals' impact on negative and positive outcomes of events, the perception of social conflict as challenge and reacting to that conflict with anger or anxiety co-occurs with the tendency towards the avoidant coping strategy. Among the familial determinants of the avoidant coping strategy, an important role is played by the inadequate parental attitudes towards the adolescent child, as well as the pattern of avoidance in situations of social conflict in the parents.

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Conclusions

Learning about the causes of the avoidant coping strategy in the young person will allow the parents and teachers to better understand the adolescents' behaviour in situations of social conflict and look at its roots from the adolescent's perspective. Understanding the causes of this behaviour may become a starting point for creating educational strategies that help young people cope with conflict in a mature way.

Keywords: youth, personality, family, avoidant coping strategy, situation of social conflict

Introduction

Adults do not always fully appreciate the number of difficult situations that young people encounter. Difficult social situations which threaten the realization of an individual's goals or fulfilling their needs are frequent in the lives of adolescents. During adolescence, young people have various – sometimes contradictory – aspirations and cope with inconsistent social expectations of others. Each day, young people face the necessity to solve various problems at school, in their relationships with peers, and at home. The results of research to date show that adolescents perceive interpersonal conflicts (which include conflicts with teachers, arguments with schoolmates and romantic partners, and arguments with one or both parents and other relatives) as sources of intense negative emotional stimulation (Gurba, 2020; Polak, 2010; Riesch et al., 2000).

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 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 of interests, needs, or aspirations become clearly emphasized (Balawajder, 2010).

Situations of social conflict – which are part of the category of difficult social interactions – are a constant part of human life. Since birth, each person learns to cope with the encountered difficulties and challenges. A difficult situation encourages an individual to begin activity oriented towards reestablishing the balance between the expectations and the individual's executive capacity and/or the improvement of their emotional state. The activity they choose in a difficult situation is defined, in a specific situational context, as a coping strategy (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000). The ability to cope in situations of social conflict may take the form of destructive behaviour (Borecka-Biernat et al., 2019; Krok, 2007; Rostowska, 2001; Williams & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2000) whose goal is to decrease the unpleasant emotional tension and/or improving the individual's mood. It is achieved through avoiding confrontation with the situation of social conflict, escaping or withdrawing from the situation, avoiding thinking about that situation through ignoring the problem, engaging in alternative activities that absorb the individual's attention and distract them from the conflict (thinking about pleasant things, daydreaming, listening to music, physical exercise, playing computer games, surfing the Internet, going for walks, or sleeping), and seeking interaction with other people.

Personality Determiners of Avoidant Coping Strategies in Youth in Situations of Social Conflict

As mentioned, situations of social conflict are connected with the problem of avoidant coping strategies in specific situational context, applied in order to avoid or minimize the tension, loss, or unfavourable outcomes. Why do young people in situations of social conflict choose the strategy of avoiding reacting to difficulties? According to Tyszkowa (1986), the cognitive schemes – that is, the image of the world (the “world” structure) and the image of oneself (the “self” structure) are significant elements of human behavioural mechanisms in difficult situations. The cognitive structures of personality act as lenses, or filters, which are used by the personality to select information from outside. A person’s perspective on the world, their attitudes and expectations towards themselves or others and towards their tasks and outcomes of their own activities determine their type of cognitive and emotional perception and interpretation of difficult situations, which impacts the individual’s behaviour in those situations.

The information one has about their own personality, the traits that constitute one’s knowledge of oneself are the basis for one’s assessment of their ability to cope with difficult situations (Leśniak, 2003). Self-esteem is inseparably associated with one’s concept of oneself; it is the assessing and evaluating component of one’s knowledge of one’s “self”. It is expressed through a less or more critical attitude towards oneself, and its level is a significant part of determining it (Szpitlak & Polczyk, 2015). As a central mechanism of personality, it is a factor that bears particular significance for human behaviour. The impact of self-esteem becomes apparent in the way an individual functions in difficult situations (Tyszkowa, 1986; Borecka-Biernat, 2006). A low self-esteem facilitates a tendency towards resignation from goals, inaction, and withdrawal from social interactions. A person with low self-esteem tends to overestimate the severity of the difficulties they face and is more willing to surrender than to confront them. Lack of faith in one’s abilities, indecisiveness and low confidence, and the tendency to abandon activities after experiencing failure impede those individuals’ ability to cope with tension and situations of conflict (Wosińska, 2004; Kobosko, 2013).

The choice of the coping mechanism that a particular individual uses depends on their personality traits. Tyszkowa (1986) focuses on mechanisms of control and their functioning in the context of control over situations. Locus of control means the degree to which individuals perceive the results of their own activities as determined by their actions or, on the contrary – as dependent on chance or external circumstances (Rotter, 1966; Wosińska, 2004). Thus, locus of control as a dimension of personality is determined by the subjective conviction of external or internal control of the outcomes of one’s actions. Studies conducted by various researchers, including Adesin (2012), Borecka-Biernat et al. (2019), Hisli Sahin et al. (2009), Kurtek (2005) and Talik (2010) have shown that locus of control is an important individual factor modifying the individual’s functioning in difficult situations and determining the coping strategies that they apply. Individuals who believe that their activities do not have a large impact on their achievements, and who perceive the outcomes of their actions as existing outside

of their control, choose, during stressful confrontations (which they assess as impossible for them to control), to distance themselves from the situation or cope by avoidance or withdrawal. In difficult situations they tend to be excessively pessimistic (“nothing can be done anyway”), which is their way to excuse their passive attitude and isolation in difficult interpersonal situations, or excessively optimistic (“everything will be alright”), which is how they explain their lack of initiative or creativity that results in stereotypical, avoidant behaviour. This means that in situations that cannot be controlled or changed, an individual’s activity focuses on escaping the problem without attempting to solve it.

Human behaviour in a difficult situation depends largely on the person’s assessment of their circumstances (Lazarus, 1986). People continually assess information that they receive from their environment to determine its connection with their own actions and its significance. The particular role of cognitive assessment becomes especially visible during difficult situations which interfere with the person’s routine, pose a threat to the individual, or impede or prevent the realization of their needs. The stressful experience can be assessed as threat, harm/loss, or challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Włodarczyk & Wrześniewski, 2005), depending on the individual’s goals or values. Individual assessment of a specific difficult situation influences the decisions the person makes regarding engagement in activities (coping strategies) which might remove the causes of the difficult situation, or at least alleviate its results (Heszen-Niejodek, 2002). The results of the study by Antonini (1998) have indicated that the avoidant strategy is preferred when the individual’s interest in their own – as well as their opponent’s – gain in conflict is small, and when the cost or the risk connected with engagement in the conflict is high, and the potential profit insufficient. To an extent, it explains the observed relationship between the avoidant strategy and the assessment of one’s situation as threat, when the risk is high, or as harm/loss when there is nothing more to gain. The results of research by Anshel and Wells (2000) and Mikulincer and Victor (1995) have shown that assessment of a situation as threat initiates the avoidant strategies of denial and rejecting the information about the stressful situation, and of protecting oneself from that information by engaging in other, stress-free activities. Studies conducted by Abdullah et al. (2018), Didymus and Fletcher (2014) have established that assessment of a situation as harm/loss may lead to avoidant coping strategies.

Assessment of a difficult situation from the perspective of the dissonance between the individual’s aspirations and goals and their ability to realize those aspirations in a specific situational context generates negative emotions (Humphrey, 2006; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Those emotions might initiate explorative activity and their expansion may sometimes become uncontrollable, leading to disorganization of the individual’s behaviour. Negative emotions function as a factor that motivates the subject to initiate activities oriented towards coping with events which triggered them (Frijda, 2002; Heszen-Niejodek, 2002). The results of studies by Borecka-Biernat et al. (2019), Domińska-Werbel (2014), Larsson et al. (2000) and Sikorski (2015) have shown that in the sequence of anxiety-fear, emotions usually lead to withdrawal, escape, and distancing from the cause of a particular emotion. A young person, defending themselves from

anxiety, less or more consciously applies such coping strategies as withdrawal from the anxiety-inducing situation, “drowning out” the anxiety through various alternative activities (sleeping, eating, shopping), seeking the company of other people (meeting friends, spending time surrounded by people), attempting to not think about the problem, escaping into dreams and fantasies, obtaining items that are expected to bring luck, such as talismans, substance abuse, or use of tranquilizers.

Family Determinants of Avoidant Coping Strategies in Youth in Situations of Social Conflict

The coping habits are acquired by children as they develop in specific conditions; in the family home, those conditions are to a large extent determined by the parents' attitudes (Tyszkowa, 1986). Children grow up in various circumstances and – depending on their parents' behaviour – have different access to shaping both beneficial and harmful coping strategies. Literature provides data which indicates that avoidant coping strategies in difficult social interactions are a consequence of inappropriate parenting (Borecka-Biernat et al., 2018; Januszewska, 2001; Minda, 2019), manifested as excessive emotional distance (avoidant attitude, rejection of the child), in which the parents display hostility towards the child and neglect their needs, and excessive expectations whose axial symptom is “moulding” the child to fit an ideal present in the parents' minds and ignoring their developmental abilities. Individuals who experienced this treatment during adolescence tend to display avoidance in difficult social situations, such as conflict.

It is worth noting that the impact of the individual's family is realized consciously as well as unconsciously, through behavioural patterns functioning in the family. Family is a rich source of patterns of behaviour in various situations; children learn their main patterns of reacting to difficulties and emotional tension from their parents' behaviour in analogical circumstances (Bandura, 2007; Tyszkowa, 1986). Most families apply similar coping mechanisms in difficult situations, which is the consequence of intergenerational transmission (Rostowska, 1997). The impact that the parents – who act as role models, usually unconsciously – have on the child is not always positive. The result of parental modelling are forms of reacting to difficult situations that focus on resignation from the realization of one's goals after the encountered difficulties and withdrawal from the difficult situation. The child, who observes their parents' difficulties in social situations – especially when they are the subject of identification – begins to copy their behaviour. The research conducted by Zimbardo (2011) indicates that the tendency to withdraw and avoid social interactions and inappropriate ways of participating in those interactions in adolescents are learnt behaviours, acquired through observation and frequent contacts with people from the adolescent's environment who display similar behaviour and act as role models (usually the parents). Therefore, a basis exists for the conclusion that the family is an area in which adolescents learn, through role modelling, avoidant coping mechanisms in difficult situations which contain an element of threat to the person's aspiration or goals.

The Research Problem

The empirical study was focused on the personality and family determinants of the avoidant coping strategy in youth in situations of social conflict, with particular focus on the role of the self-esteem, locus of control, type of cognitive assessment of the situation of conflict, the level and type of emotions, as well as parental attitudes and the model of coping applied by the parents in situations of social conflict. Gender of the parents and adolescents was taken into account. The goal of the study was to answer the following question:

1. Which collection of personality and family variables is connected with an increased use of the avoidant strategy in conflict, in girls and boys?

Thus formulated, the research question allows to construct the following hypothesis which can be verified through an analysis of the obtained results of the conducted empirical study:

H1: Girls and boys with a low level of self-esteem, an external locus of control, who assess situations of conflict as threat or harm/loss, who experience a high level of negative emotions, who perceive their parents' attitude as inappropriate (excessive emotional distance, excessive requirements), and whose one or both parents display avoidant coping strategies during social conflict, choose avoidant coping strategies more frequently.

Method

Participants and the Method of Conducting the Study

The studied sample consisted of 468 girls and 425 boys aged 13 to 15. The participants were students of the first, second, and third years of the middle school. The schools were selected randomly, but not all agreed to participate in the study. For this reason, several of the participating schools had been selected arbitrarily. The study was conducted on groups, on the schools' premises. Voluntary and anonymous participation were ensured for all participants; the study was conducted in compliance with standards for psychological research.

Research Tools

The following methods were applied in the study:

- The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) adapted by Dzwonkowska, Lachowicz-Tabaczek, and Łaguna (2007) allows to calculate the level of general (global) self-esteem both in young people and in adults. SES consists of ten diagnostic descriptive statements which the respondents use to self-evaluate. A high result indicates a high level of general (global) self-esteem.

- SES is a reliable tool (Cronbach's alpha ranges between .81 and .83) of confirmed diagnostic validity.
- The Sense of Control Questionnaire (SCQ) by Krasowicz and Kurzyp-Wojnarska (1990) consists of 46 questions with multiple answer options; 36 of those questions are diagnostic, and the remaining 10 are buffer questions. Diagnostic questions address simple situations from school life and they are divided into two scales: Scale of Success (S) and Scale of Failures (F), with the former containing questions referring to favourable experiences, and the latter – questions referring to unfavourable ones. The sum of the results obtained from the success and failure scales shows the ratio of the generalized sense of control (S + F). Low results in the SCQ questionnaire indicate a sense of external control of the consequences of events, while high results suggest an internal locus of control. The questionnaire is characterized by sufficient reliability (KR-20 for Scale S is .54, and for F .69) and criterion validity.
 - The Stress Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) designed by Włodarczyk and Wrześniewski (2010) consists of 35 adjectives (including 23 diagnostic ones) evaluating stressful situations. It exists in two versions which contain 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 situation of social conflict). 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 situations of social conflict). SAQ contains 6 subscales which act as indicators of particular types of stress assessment, including the following: state-threat and trait-threat, state-harm/loss, and 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” subscale contains 4 items. The questionnaire is characterized by sufficient reliability (Cronbach's alpha for Version A is .76-.90 and for Version B .79-.90), factor validity, as well as criterion validity.
 - The Three-Factor Inventory of Personality States and Traits (TIPST) is a Polish version of the American State-Trait Personality Inventory (STPI) designed by Spielberger (compare: Wrześniewski, 1991). TIPST consists of two independent parts. Part 1 (SPI) is used to measure anxiety, anger, and curiosity as emotional states experienced in specific situations. Part 2 (TPI) is used to study the same emotions, but as personality traits. The test consists of 6 scales: anxiety as state and anxiety as trait, anger as state and anger as trait, and curiosity as state and curiosity as trait. Each of the scales contains 10 short, simple statements referring to the individual's subjective perceptions. The reliability of the Polish version of TIPST Inventory is similar to the original version of STPI and Cronbach's α reliability coefficients range from .82 to .92 for the first part (SPI), and for the

second part (TPI) from .68 to .88 depending on the sample. The accuracy of TIPST was checked in two ranges: theoretical accuracy and diagnostic accuracy. The results concerning accuracy of TIPST are satisfactory and close to the original STPI version.

- The Parental Attitudes Scale (PAS) (Plopa, 2015) is used to study parental attitudes as perceived by children; it is comprised of 75 statements, in separate versions for the mother and the father. The participant responds to each statement by choosing one of four possible answers: “true”, “mostly true”, “difficult to say”, “mostly untrue”, and “not true” (corresponding to 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 point, respectively). The questionnaire contains 5 scales, each of which consists of 15 statements. These include the following: Acceptance/Rejection Attitude (I), Autonomy Attitude (II), Protective Attitude (III), Demanding Attitude (IV), and Inconsistent Attitude (V). SPR is a standardized tool. The reliability coefficient ranges between .81 and .92 for “My Mother” and between .79 and .91 for “My Father”. A high level of content validity has been observed for this tool, on the basis of the method of studying the internal structure of the test and the method of studying the differences between groups, as well as criterion validity.
- The Questionnaire for Coping Strategies in Parents in Situations of Social Conflict (QSPC) by Borecka-Biernat (2013) consists of two versions: “My Mother” and “My Father”. It studies coping strategies applied by parents in situations of social conflict as perceived by their adolescent children. The tool contains 16 descriptions of situations of social conflict in both versions (“My Mother” and “My Father”). Each situation presents four types of behaviour expressing the parents’ coping strategies in situations of social conflict as perceived by their children; these include aggressive strategies (“A”), avoidant strategies (“AV”), submissive strategies (“S”), and “task-oriented strategies” (“T”). The results are collected separately for each scale, through summing the behaviours that the participant of the survey has marked for each of the 16 situations. The Avoidant Strategies Scale was used for the purposes of the present study. Both versions of the questionnaire (“My Mother” and “My Father”) are characterized by good reliability (Cronbach’s alpha is approximately, or above, .70) and diagnostic validity.
- The Questionnaire for Coping Strategies in Adolescents in Situations of Social Conflict (QSAC) by Borecka-Biernat (2012) studies the coping strategies applied by adolescent youth in situations of social conflict. It consists of 33 descriptions of situations of social conflict, each which is accompanied by descriptions of the following coping behaviours: aggressive strategy (“A”), avoidant strategy (“AV”), submissive strategy (“S”), and task-oriented strategy (“T”). The results are obtained separately for each scale through summing the behaviours marked by the participant in the 33 listed situations. The Avoidant Strategies Scale (“A”) was used for the purposes of the present study. The questionnaire is characterized by good reliability (Cronbach’s alpha is approximately, or above, .70) and diagnostic validity.

Results

Due to a large number of dependent variables, the decision was made to apply hierarchical regression with backward elimination (criterion: F removal probability $\geq .100$). The method introduces all potential predictors in the model and then successively removes the irrelevant variables; afterwards, the model is calculated again, until the final result is obtained (Bedyńska & Książek, 2012). Separate analyses have been conducted for groups of participants of different gender. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Multiple stepwise regression for the results of the Avoidant Scale (“AV”) of QSAC in comparison with the scales of SES, SCQ, SAQ, TIPST, PAS and QSPC, versions “My Mother” and “My Father”: for girls (N = 468) and boys (N = 425)

| Participants | Variable | Beta | B | Standard error B | t | Level p < |
|--------------|-------------------------|------|------|------------------|-------|-----------|
| Girls | LOC (S + F) | -.17 | -.10 | .03 | -3.84 | < .001 |
| | P. demanding of mother | .15 | .04 | .01 | 3.60 | < .001 |
| | P. protective of father | -.14 | -.04 | .02 | -3.19 | .002 |
| | “AV” of mother | .30 | .57 | .08 | 6.82 | < .001 |
| | Free trem | | 5.49 | 1.05 | 5.25 | < .001 |

Coefficient of multiple correlation: $R = .44$
 Adjusted coefficient of multiple determination: $R^2 = .19$
 Significance of the equations: $F(4.463) = 27.26; p < .001$
 Standard error of estimate: 3.08

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------------------|------|------|------|-------|--------|
| Boys | LOC (S + F) | -.27 | -.17 | .03 | -5.80 | < .001 |
| | challenge – trait | .12 | .11 | .04 | 2.87 | .004 |
| | anger – trait | .10 | .06 | .03 | 2.10 | .04 |
| | anxiety-state | .12 | .14 | .05 | 2.71 | .007 |
| | curiosity – trait | -.11 | -.08 | .03 | -2.48 | .01 |
| | P. demanding of father | -.15 | -.04 | .02 | -2.11 | .04 |
| | P. inconsistent of father | .17 | .05 | .02 | 2.40 | .02 |
| | “AV” of mother | .24 | .43 | .08 | 5.52 | < .001 |
| Free trem | | 4.16 | 1.64 | 2.53 | .01 | |

Coefficient of multiple correlation: $R = .53$
 Adjusted coefficient of multiple determination: $R^2 = .28$
 Significance of the equations: $F(8.416) = 20.10; p < .001$
 Standard error of estimate: 3.03

LOC (S + F) – generalized locus of control, “AV” – avoidant strategy in situations of social conflict, P. – parental attitude

Source: own study.

Among 32 personality and family variables, in the regression equation the following variables have significant impact on avoidant coping strategies in girls in situations of social conflict: the generalized locus of control, the demanding attitude in the mother, the protective attitude in the father, and the avoidant coping strategy in the mother in situations of social conflict. The coefficient of determination is not high ($R^2 = .19$), which means that only 19% of variability of the avoidant coping strategy in girls in situations of social conflict has been explained by the applied set of independent variables [$F(4.463) = 27.26$; $p < .001$]. The remaining independent variables included in the study were insignificant indicators of the avoidant coping strategy in situations of conflict in girls. The *Beta* coefficient indicates that the stronger the generalized external locus of control, the higher the level of the demanding attitude in the mother, the lower the level (in the expected direction) of the protective attitude of the father, and the higher the level of the avoidant coping strategy of the mother in situations of social conflict, the higher becomes the level of application of the avoidant coping strategy in girls in situations of social conflict.

Which set of personality and family variables is significant in the group of boys? The results of another regression analysis presented in Table 1. The results show that the avoidant coping strategy in boys in situations of social conflict is significantly influenced by the following: the generalized locus of control, dispositional assessment of conflict as challenge, anger as a personality trait, anxiety as an emotional state, and curiosity as a personality trait, as well as the demanding attitude in the father, the inconsistent attitude in the father, and the avoidant strategy in the mother in situations of social conflict. The coefficient of determination is $R^2 = .28$ and indicates that 28% of the dependent variable (avoidant coping strategy in situations of social conflict in boys) is explained by the listed variables [$F(8.416) = 20.10$; $p < .001$]. The *Beta* coefficient indicates that the stronger the generalized external locus of control, the higher the level of dispositional assessment of the situation of social conflict as challenge, the higher the level of the learnt behavioural disposition to react with anger, the higher level of anxiety understood as temporary emotional state experienced as a result of conflict, and the lower the level of the learnt behavioural disposition to react with curiosity, and the lower level (in the expected direction) of the demanding attitude in the father, the higher the level of inconsistent attitude in the father, and the higher the level of avoidant coping strategy in the mother in situations of social conflict, the higher becomes the level of avoidant coping strategy in boys in situations of social conflict.

In the light of the performed statistical verification it can be concluded that the obtained results partially confirm the hypothesis H1 presented in the methodology section of the article.

Discussion

Locus of control is a significant variable modifying the functioning of a young person in a situation of social conflict. The conducted research indicates that the

generalized locus of control “shifts” towards external factors in girls and boys who apply avoidant coping strategies (such as engaging in alternative activities or seeking social interactions) in situations of social conflict. Young people do not believe that the good and desirable events that they experience are a result of their actions, instead ascribing the responsibility to advantageous coincidences or other people’s favour. Assigning the responsibility for their successes to chance or luck may result in passivity and lack of willingness to control their own fate. The tendency to have an external locus of control in adolescents who apply avoidant coping strategies in situations of social conflict can also be observed in case of the experienced failures. Individuals who display this tendency are unable to accept responsibility for their failures, instead seeing their cause in external factors which they cannot control, such as bad luck or other people’s malice. Lack of the sense of responsibility for one’s own failures prevents the emergence of motivation to attempt to change one’s life, because “if it’s meant to be, it’ll be”. Moreover, the individual tries to accept their fate and engages in other activities in order to distract their attention from the problem they are experiencing (Hisli Sahin et al., 2009; Taylor, 2010).

An important factor determining an individual’s course of action in conflict is how they perceive it. Research has shown that, in boys who apply avoidant coping strategies in situations of social conflict, the dispositional assessment of social conflict as challenge is higher. This tendency does not seem to be consistent with the results of studies obtained by Abdullah et al. (2018), Anshel and Wells (2000) and Didymus and Fletcher (2014). Avoiding confrontation with the conflict is a form of defending oneself from the threatening situation, or from an existing harm in the form of loss of material possessions or personal values (Heszen-Niejodek, 2002). It means that the connection between the higher level of dispositional assessment of social conflict as challenge and the avoidant coping strategy in young people in situations of social conflict becomes a result that is difficult to explain. A possible explanation is the existence of mutual configurations of predictors of avoidant coping strategies in situations of social conflict, in which a large number of dimensions unfavourable for initiating activity by the adolescent may suggest their superior strength in comparison with the challenge-disposition that the adolescent also displays. Therefore, an external locus of control, accompanied by a higher level of negative emotions and a lower level of positive emotions, inappropriate parental attitudes, and application of the avoidant coping strategy by the parents in situations of social conflict may contribute to abandoning activity despite a capacity for facing challenges that the individual observes in themselves.

The inability to manage situations of conflict or solve problems in relationships with others leads to intensification of negative emotions in social situations (Oleś, 1998). The conducted study has shown that boys who apply the avoidant coping strategy in situations of social conflict display a significantly higher level of momentary state of anxiety, a higher level of learnt disposition towards reacting with anger, as well as a lower level of learnt disposition towards reacting with curiosity. It allows to suspect that after reaching a significant level of intensity, negative emotions decrease cognitive curiosity, hinder spontaneous

activity, lower the motivation to initiate transgressive actions, and activate such behaviours as escape (withdrawal, avoidance) from the situation of social conflict, which facilitates to, at least temporarily, decrease the negative emotional tension (Leary & Kowalski, 2001; Sandy et al., 2005). This means that the increase of the level of negative emotions in adolescents in interpersonal situations which create a threat to the realization of their aspirations is accompanied by more frequent application of the avoidant coping strategy, manifested as engaging in alternative activities (sleeping, eating, shopping) and/or seeking contacts with other people (meeting friends) (Borecka-Biernat et al., 2019; Domińska-Werbel, 2014; Heszen-Niejodek, 2002; Sikorski, 2015).

An analysis of the collected research material has indicated that the avoidant strategy of reacting to emotional tension, activating in situations of social conflict, is formed in the process of upbringing in which the mother's behaviour is domineering, controlling, and moulds the daughter's life according to the mother's own patterns and expectations. The mother, following an inflexible model of parenting, strictly executes obedience, and does not tolerate discrepancies between the behaviour and achievements of the adolescent child with her own expectations, accepting only those actions which are consistent with her requirements. Such attitudes in the mother interferes with the need for affiliation, autonomy, independence, and cooperation in the adolescent daughter. Systematic corrections and criticism from the parent leads to a lack of initiative, passivity, and withdrawal in the adolescent in situations that require their active engagement (Januszewska, 2001; Plopa, 2015). The adolescent girl who feels that her activities are limited may acquire the conviction that her ability to meet social expectations is also decreased. This experience may lead to passivity, withdrawal, and abstaining from activity. Therefore, it appears that the numerous rules and expectations established by the mother, that the daughter must fulfill, accompanied by systematic disapproval and criticism which do not allow her any initiative in her activities, significantly impact the development of the avoidant strategy in situations of social conflict that the adolescent encounters.

It is also worth noting that the study reveals the fact that the fathers' attitude towards sons, as perceived by adolescent boys who apply the avoidant strategy in situations of conflict, is varied and depends on temporary moods and other personal matters. The father transfers his emotional state onto his relationship with his son. His investment in the adolescent's problems becomes intertwined with the tendency to ignore them, shout at the son, and impose limitations and punishments. In the son, the lack of stability in the father's behaviour causes emotional imbalance, a sense of uncertainty, the motivation to hide his problems, lack of trust and unwillingness to openly discuss his problems with the father. Withdrawing from the relationship with the parent, an adolescent child begins to fight the negative emotions they feel or distance themselves from the psychological discomfort they experience (Minda, 2019; Plopa, 2015). It can be suspected that the lack of stability caused by the inconsistent attitude in the father causes a sense of insecurity in the son, which results in negative emotions in situations that threaten the realization of the son's personal goals. The adolescent, defending himself from the negative emotions, withdraws from the situation in which

he might have to confront his emotional tension with a real or perceived threat (Lemerise & Dodge, 2005).

Research has also shown that a mother who applies the avoidant strategy in difficult social situations contributes to the development – in sons and daughters – the avoidant strategy, which they choose in situations of social conflict. It is worth noting that, in copying the behaviour of the role model in natural circumstances, an important role is played by the model's trait that facilitates identification with them: gender. Thus, the mother influences the development of the avoidant coping strategy in situations of social conflict in girls, who identify with the mother and copy her behaviour. The opposite-sex parent's choice of behaviour can also, however, facilitate the appearance of the avoidant coping strategy in adolescent boys. This shows that the development of avoidant coping strategies in situations of social conflict is influenced primarily by the personality traits of the parent with whom the child identifies rather than the gender of the model and the person who identifies with them (Rychlak & Legerski, 1967). On the basis of these results, it can be concluded that an adolescent's withdrawal from situations of social conflict is a learnt behaviour, acquired through observation and frequent contact with the mother, who functions as a role model (Borecka-Biernat et al., 2018).

The analyzed results of the study have partially confirmed the formulated hypotheses. The reason for the partial confirmation might be connected with the subjectiveness of the assessment in the answers submitted by the participants. Due to the study covering a broad scope of subjects connected with the problem of avoidant coping strategies in youth in situations of social conflict, the results have brought many valuable conclusions connected with significant predictors of this phenomenon. The conclusions can be applied both theoretically and practically. It appears that the obtained information may allow educators to improve their understanding of avoidant behaviour in adolescents in situations of social conflict and to look at this issue from the young people's perspective. It might become a starting point for the creation of educational strategies that might shape young people so that they are able to cope with conflict in a mature fashion.

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