An aggressive coping strategy of gymnasium students in social conflict situations: Emotional and family determinants

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Abstract. The aim of the study was to evaluate the contribution of emotions and parents’ coping strategies in conflicts to generating the youth’s aggressive coping strategy in social conflict situations. The research involved 893 adolescents (468 girls and 425 boys) aged 13–15. Analysis of the collected research material enabled us to conclude that aggression is a form of coping with anger and anxiety felt in social conflict situations. It was found out that the mother and the father who employ a strategy based on aggression contribute to the modelling of a strategy involving aggressive behaviour applied in social conflict situations by the youth.

Keywords: junior high school adolescent, emotional reactions, modelling behaviour, aggressive coping strategy, social conflict situations.

Introduction

A conflict with another person is regarded as one of the most difficult social situations in the life of every human being (Tyszkowa, 1986). In the context of interpersonal relationships it presents a type of interaction between partners in which they become clearly aware of the differences in their interests, needs, endeavours or goals (Balawajder, 2010). Teenagers frequently face complicated social situations that include an element of threat to the fulfilment of their endeavours or accomplishment of their objectives (satisfaction of...
the needs). The findings of the present study show that young people in their adolescence consider interpersonal conflicts as a source of a strong sense of stress: a conflict with a teacher, arguments with schoolfriends and with family members (Jaworski, 2000; Gusz-

The most conflicting areas in a student-teacher relationship are school grades, tact-
less behaviour of the teacher, domineering pressure and inflexibility of requirements (cf. Miłkowska, 2012). As for peer conflicts, the main reasons are provocations and mockery, groundless suspicions, slander, unfulfilled promises, treason, indiscretion,
competition for grades, popularity among the opposite sex, ruling in the class and sport-
ing prestige (Różańska-Kowal, 2004). Most problems related to mutual understanding
of parents and children are due to the change of the adolescents’ attitude towards their
parents. Young people are less open to their parents who, in turn, often fail to cope with
increasing autonomy of their adolescent children, by trying to limit it (Ornstein & Car-
trnsen, 1991; Obuchowska, 2010). Numerous conflicts with parents concern everyday
situations – differences in tastes, opinions, for instance, as regards their performance at
school, clothing, music, watching TV, using the computer, leisure activities or coming
home late (Jaworski, 2000).

Social conflict situations cannot be ruled out from human life. From the birth mo-
ment every person must learn to cope with the difficulties and challenges that s/he faces.
A difficult situation encourages a young person to an activity aimed at recovering the
balance between the requirements of the situation and the abilities to adapt and/or to
improve the state of emotions. An activity that a young person undertakes in a difficult
situation is considered as a strategy of coping with that difficult situation in view of
a specific situational context (Wrześniewski, 1996). It is worth, therefore, noting how
young people cope with conflict situations that take place at schools, in their relations
with peers or at home.

As mentioned before, school environment is particularly stressful for adolescents – this
especially concerns conflicts with teachers and schoolmates. Previous research results
have indicated that teenagers apply different strategies to cope with school problems.
Among them, teenagers mention aggressive behaviour against persons and objects. The
data obtained by Różańska-Kowal (2004), Woźniak-Krakowian and Wieczorek (2009),
Miłkowska (2012) show that subject classes and breaks between the classes create sit-
uations particularly favourable for aggressive ways of stress release. During the classes
student aggression is most frequently realized by intentional disturbance of the class
conducted by teachers, destroying personal objects left on the teacher’s desk, and shar-
ing bad opinions about a teacher with their peers and parents. More than half of the
surveyed students admit that they behave aggressively during breaks between classes.
Here, symptoms of physical aggression (e.g. buffeting, pushing, kicking) prevail, while
verbal aggression manifests itself in naming, mocking and taunts. Sequestered rooms
(e.g. a locker-room, a hallway, a toilet) where students most often stay without a teacher’s presence, constitute a particular risk during breaks between classes. When asked about the reasons for their aggression during breaks, students indicate mainly taking revenge on somebody and conflicts. A significant number of students have conflicts with other students and hence experience harsh emotional strain. Students usually release this strain through arguing and/or fighting.

Frączek (2003) conducted an interesting study on strategies of coping with conflict situations in a peer group. Children aged 9, 11 and 15 from Israel, Finland, Poland, and Italy took part in it. The results of this research demonstrate that girls are better in handling conflicts compared to boys and that they more often strive for agreement. An aggressive strategy is more common among boys than girls. Aggression of boys and girls takes different forms. In the case of the latter, it is more indirect, hidden, and used for defence. It is passive, it adopts a form of emotional rejection, informing against others, accusing and pouting. Boys use open, physical, more active and direct forms of aggressive behaviour. This research shows that younger children more often tend to use physical and instrumental aggression, while the older ones display verbal and hostile aggression.

As children grow up, conflict situations with their parents become a more and more important source of their tension. As Jaworski (2000) notices, conflicts in child–parent relationships are a common phenomenon in adolescence. Children at an older school age want to break their parents’ guardianship and demand their rights to be broader than ever before with all their behaviour. The obstacles and failures that they come across, as well as the bans and limitations imposed by their parents trigger their angry reactions. These are expressed by arrogant replies, slamming the door, sometimes crying or direct acts of aggression oriented towards objects or persons. Adolescents’ aggression against their parents is manifested in words, ironic statements, ignorance of their commands, or silence. The author concludes that in conflict situations teenagers often show much ruthlessness, aggression, brutality, indifference, and even cynicism. In addition, the studies by Lachowska (2010) show that adolescents aged 14 and 15 in a conflict with their parents perceive themselves as more aggressive towards their parents and less compromising, especially in a relationship with their mother.

A conflict situation, which is an immanent element of social interactions, causes a strong negative emotional strain. Persistent emotional excitation of high intensity and negative character form the basis for aggressive behaviour, irritation, anger outbursts and other seemingly unjustified emotional reactions that may be observed in various types of destructive behaviour (Terelak, 2001). Emotions following the sequence irritation – exasperation – anger lead to aggressive behaviour. Their intensity defines intensification and the form of aggression. As Łosiak (2009) notes, exasperation and anger are related emotional states that are similar at the level of subjective experience and are a link to aggressive behaviour. According to S. Rosenzweig (1976) and Berkowitz (1992), anger and exasperation trigger actions aimed at recovery of threatened or lost
aims of activity, and they lead to aggressive behaviours. In addition, Skorny (1987, p. 97) sustains this opinion saying that “occurrence of anger and exasperation, willingness of harming, teasing, damaging or hurting constitute a subjective equivalent of aggression”.

In turn, the following emotions in the sequence anxiety–fear–fright generally lead to withdrawal or escape (Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Łosiak, 2009). It seems that in natural conditions anger is an emotion that stimulates an action of fighting, while fear actuates an action of running away. However, observations indicate that fear may be the reason for attack when an individual has nowhere to run away, when he has no other options than aggression or an attack. Concurrence of the fear – aggression relationship is indicated by Ranschburg (1993, p. 137) who compares fear and aggression to a reversible coat: “aggression and timidity are two sides of the same phenomenon [...]. It is similar to a reversible coat: if a timid side is out, aggression is directed inwards, but when aggression is out, timidity may be found inside for sure”. It is also worth referring to Kępiński’s (1992, p. 292) statement that “in aggression a human being leaves an anxiety position of being hounded, where their space-time continuum is maximally shrunk and they hit the surrounding world with anger and despair. Destruction of some part of this world brings them relief and the sense of being the winner, that not only failure is their destiny”. And so aggression becomes an aggressive form of coping with fear felt in difficult social situations. This reaction helps to release anxiety tension or to hide fear (Eysenck, 2001; Nitendel-Bujakowa, 2001). However, it is worth noticing that the influence of fear on behaviour depends on its intensity (Kubacka-Jasiecka, 1996; Eysenck, 2001; Leary & Kowalski, 2001; Nitendel-Bujakowa, 2001). Fear of high intensity renders it impossible to efficiently overcome difficulties, impedes spontaneous human activity, causes loss of control over one’s own behaviour, withdrawing or running away from a difficult situation or an aggressive behaviour model. However, fear at low and moderate levels enables us to make an effort to solve a problem through reorganisation oriented towards a purpose of activities. This means that fear of low intensity may stimulate human behaviour but its high intensity disorganises it since it actuates perceiving many situations as threatening, even if objectively they are nothing like this.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that difficult social situations may result in positive emotions and satisfaction with a possibility of overcoming difficulties in an individual. Positive emotions are conducive to thinking and creativity and increase flexibility of reactions, and thus they cooperate in experimenting, discovering new phenomena, searching for new solutions (Fredrickson, 2001). Curiosity is one of possible positive emotional reactions that induce behaviours that contribute to solving problems. It reflects intense desire for exploration, discovery and one’s will to understand some new features of the environment (Doliński, 2000; Voss & Keller, 2006; Łaguna & Bąk, 2007; Spielberger & Reheiser, 2009). Thus, some contradictions, novelties or a desire to learn the characteristics of a situation invoke emotional reactions of curiosity.
As can be seen above, difficult social situations can generate both positive emotions (which stimulate active struggling with difficulties) and negative emotions. The latter ones are generally unpleasant, and therefore people seek to release such emotions. To defend themselves against these they employ aggression that involves the necessity to approach the threat to destroy it, which enables the reduction of emotional tension.

From what we already know, each person possesses a list of his strategies of coping with difficult situations in social interactions. These strategies are forms of behaviour acquired in accordance with the general principles of learning. The natural environment conducive to learning in how to react to difficult situations is the family, and parents are most often the first models for the child to copy specific strategies for coping with difficulties that s/he faces with. Tyszkowa (1986) concluded that a child finds the main patterns of response to difficulties in his/her parents’ behaviour in situations of emotional tension and in their attitude towards the child’s difficulties and failures in action.

The studies have proven that the majority of aggressive children come from families where one or both parents are aggressive (Cywińska, 2005; Wolińska, 2013). Aggressive forms of behaviour in children’s conflicts are the reflection of family conflicts which, for children, are a negative model in this regard. Children who come from families exposed to conflicts adopt frequent arguments, harsh expressions, scenes of fighting, destruction of or throwing objects and slamming the door as their own, employing these behaviours not only in dealing with their parents and siblings, but also transferring them to school environment, where they are arrogant in behaviour towards their teachers, aggressive in contacts with their peers, where they learn to solve conflicts using force, especially when a favourable result of aggressive behaviour is observed (Patterson, 1986; Urban, 2005). Aggressive mothers and fathers are an unquestionable cause of aggressiveness of their children and their reproduction of the model of aggressive interactions (Rostowska, 1996). Undoubtedly, a child who witnesses aggressive scenes involving their parents adopts their aggressive model of social relationships. Besides, observing the unavoidable consequences of acts of aggression, the child becomes convinced that aggression is an effective way to solve any problems and includes such a conviction into the context of social interactions, which is reflected in his/her own aggressive behaviour (Obuchowska, 2001). Hence, the natural process of learning aggression as a way of solving conflict situations and the removal of a state of frustration begins. So the transmission of aggressive, socially conditioned behaviour is taking place when a child adopts aggressive forms of behaviour from his/her family environment and treats them as effective ways to cope with difficult situations.
Method

Research problems and hypotheses
The study sought to answer the following research questions:
1. Is there, and if so, what is the relationship between the level of self-esteem and a strategy of aggression of young people coping in social conflict situations?
2. Is there, and if so, to what extent, any relationship between an aggressive strategy employed by adolescents in social conflict situations and the presented model of their (one or both) parents’ aggressive strategies in such situations?
3. What set of emotional and family variables is related to the fact that during social conflict situations an aggressive strategy in adolescents is intensified?
Such formulated research questions allow us to propose the following hypotheses which will be verified by analysing the results of the conducted empirical research:
H1 Adolescents with high levels of negative emotions are characterised by greater susceptibility to apply aggressive strategies in social conflict situations.
H2 A model of one or both parents’ aggressive strategies in social conflict situations activates their adolescent children’s learning those aggressive strategies to be used in such situations.
H3 An adolescent’s aggressive strategy employed in social conflict situations is related to a high level of negative emotions as well as the presented model of one or both of his/her parents’ aggressive strategies used in such situations.

Participants
The respondent group included 468 girls and 425 boys aged 13–15. In total, 893 persons participated in the conducted research. The respondents were students of the first, second and third grades of gymnasiums from Wroclaw and the neighbouring localities. The students’ parents have been informed by the teachers that their children are invited to participate in the research programme. The research was conducted in groups and took place in schools. The participation was voluntary. The students signed with pseudonyms or initials.

Measurement
This research applies the Three-Factor Personality States and Traits Inventory (TISCO) by Spielberger and Wrześniewski (Wrześniewski, 1991), an original questionnaire to study parents’ coping strategies in social conflict situations in the child’s perception (SRwSK) (Borecka-Biernat, 2013), as well as an original questionnaire to study adolescents’ coping strategies employed in social conflict situations (KSMK) (Borecka-Biernat, 2012).
The Three-Factor Personality States and Traits Inventory (TISCO) is a Polish version of the American Saint-Trait Personality Inventory (STPI) test developed by the team of Spielberger (Wrześniewski, 1991). TISCO contains two independent parts. The first part
(SPI) measures fear, anger and curiosity treated as emotional states felt in a given moment. The second part (TPI) is applied to examine the same emotions treated as personality traits. Therefore, this test includes six subscales: fear as a state and fear as a trait, anger as a state and anger as a trait, curiosity as a state and curiosity as a trait. Each subscale includes ten short simple statements referring to subjective feelings of an individual. The respondent’s task is to tick, by choosing one of the four categorized answers, to what extent each of these statements relates to him/her. The results of individual subscales are calculated according to a pre-established pattern; then the number of points is summed up. Raw results of six subscales vary between 10 points (a low level) to 40 points (a high level). Results concerning reliability and accuracy of TISCO are satisfying and close to the original STPI version.

The SRwSK questionnaire also contains two parts – “My mother” and “My father”. It is designed to study parents’ coping strategies in social conflict situations, where these behaviours are recognized in the perception of their adolescent children. This original tool is composed of descriptions of 16 social conflict situations in the “My mother” version and of the same number of descriptions in the “My father” version. Each situation has been assigned four behaviours that express parents’ coping with social conflict situations in their child’s perception – the first one refers to aggressive coping (AG), the second one to evasive coping (E), the third one to submissive coping (S), and the fourth one to activity-based coping in social conflicts (AC). The respondent’s task is to make a choice of the forms of behaviour (one out of the four presented examples) that characterizes the parent (mother, father) when s/he is or if s/he were in a situation similar to the conflict situation described. The results are obtained for each scale separately for mothers and for fathers by summing up the selected behaviours in 16 conflict situations that belong to a given scale. Since there are 16 statements included within each scale, raw results of individual scales are within a range of 0 to 16 points. The obtained raw results are converted into normalised – Sten scores. The scores in the range of 1–4 Sten are treated as low, the scores in the range of 5–6 Sten are treated as average, and the scores within the range of 7–10 Sten are treated as high scores. Having converted the scale results to Sten scores, it is possible to define strategies employed by a mother and a father in connection with social conflict situations in the perception of their child. The SRwSK questionnaire for the “My Mother” and “My Father” versions are characterised by favourable psychometric parameters. Coefficients of reliability of the scales of the SRwSK questionnaire determined the application of the internal compliance method (Coronbach’s α) with a range from $\alpha = 0.71$ for the scales “Aggression” and “Task” to $\alpha = 0.65$ for the scales “Submission” and “Avoidance” in the version both for mothers (M) and for fathers (F).

The original questionnaire KSMK is intended to examine a coping strategy in a social conflict situation adopted by adolescents. It includes descriptions of 33 situations in a difficult social conflict. Each situation has been assigned four behaviours that demonstrate coping with social conflict situations. The first one refers to aggressive coping (AG), the second one to evasive coping (E), the third one to submissive coping (S), and the fourth
one to activity-based coping in social conflicts (AC). The respondent’s task is to think of
a situation similar to the one described in the KSMK questionnaire in which s/he has
been or to imagine it and to make a choice of the closest form of behaviour out of the four
presented in a given situation. The results are obtained separately for each scale (AG, E, S,
AC) by summing up the marked behaviours in 33 situations that belong to a given scale.
The results with adolescents employing an aggressive strategy to cope in situations of social
conflicts were obtained separately because of the results on the Aggression scale (AG).
The scales include 33 items, therefore the respondents can obtain 0 to 33 points in each of
them. The obtained raw results are converted into normalised – Sten-scores. The scores
in the range of 1–4 Sten are treated as low, the scores in the range of 5–6 Sten are treated
as average, and the scores within the range of 7–10 Sten are treated as high scores. After
converting the scale results to Sten scores, it is possible to define strategies that are employed
by an individual in social conflict situations. The KSMK questionnaire is characterized
by favourable psychometric parameters. The scale reliability coefficients are determined
by an integral consistency method (Coronbach’s α) within a range of α = 0.73 (for the
“Aggression”, “Submission” and “Task” scales) to α = 0.694 (for the “Avoidance” scale).

Results

In order to check a possible correlation between the level of fear, anger and curiosity
understood as a current state of emotions and as a personality trait, and an aggressive
coping strategy in social conflict situations, the results in the scales of the TISCO Inven-
tory and the scale of aggression (AG) of the KSMK questionnaires were correlated. The
correlation coefficient (Pearson’s r) for the entire group and for groups distinguished by
gender is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the correlation between anger as an emotional state felt in a given
moment and the scale of an aggressive strategy is statistically relevant (p < 0.001) in all
the cases – for the whole group (r = 0.27), for girls (r = 0.25), and for boys (r = 0.27). A
low correlation can be noticed: the higher the level of anger understood as a temporary
state experienced in relation to a social conflict situation in which gymnasium students
are, the more often they apply an aggressive strategy in action. The results indicate that
the value of aggressive coping in social conflict situations increases together with the
increasing value of situational anger. In addition, a relevant weak positive correlation
between anger as a personality trait and the scale of an aggressive coping strategy has
also been obtained in all the three cases – for the whole group (r = 0.32), for girls (r =
0.30), and for boys (r = 0.33). Therefore, the results suggest that in the case of adolescents,
the level of anger as a trait determines an intensified aggressive coping strategy. The data
show that the higher the level of a trained disposition to react with anger, the more often
adolescents employ an aggressive strategy in social conflict situations.
Table 1

*Summary of values of Pearson’s r correlation coefficient in the TISCO Inventory scales and in the Aggression (AG) scale of the KSMK questionnaire for the whole group and for girls and boys separately*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales of the TISCO questionnaire</th>
<th>AG scale of the KSMK questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls ((n = 468))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger-state</td>
<td>0.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger-trait</td>
<td>0.30***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear-state</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear-trait</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity-state</td>
<td>–0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity-trait</td>
<td>–0.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. TISCO = Three-Factor Personality States and Traits Inventory; KSMK = a questionnaire to study adolescents’ coping strategies in social conflict situations; AG = aggressive coping; Pearson parametric correlations (2-tailed) were used.*** \(p < 0.001\). ** \(p < 0.01\). * \(p < 0.05\).*

Table 1 also indicates a weak correlation between fear as a current emotional state felt in a social conflict situation and an aggressive coping strategy in the whole group of the respondent students \((r = 0.08)\). At the same time, the results of the statistical analysis reveal that the above-mentioned relationships are somehow determined by the factor of the respondents’ sex since they are relevant for boys \((r = 0.17)\) and not for girls. The results suggest that the higher the level of fear understood as an emotional state felt in a given moment, the higher the level of an aggressive coping strategy of the youth (with total respondents and with boys) in social conflict situations. A statistically relevant \((p < 0.001)\) weak correlation coefficient has been obtained between the level of fear understood as a personality trait and an aggressive coping strategy for the whole group \((r = 0.13)\) which is also confirmed in the group of boys \((r = 0.22)\), but in the group of girls it does not reach the level of relevance. The data show that the higher the level of fear, the more often adolescents (total respondents; boys) use an aggressive strategy in social conflict situations.

Table 1 demonstrates that the correlation between curiosity as a current emotional state and the scale of an aggressive strategy is statistically irrelevant for the whole group of adolescent respondents and for groups distinguished by gender \((p < 0.05)\). The results show no relevant correlation between curiosity understood as a relatively permanent personality trait and the strategy of aggression for the whole group of respondents and for both groups distinguished by gender. A trained disposition to perceive any difficult
situation as a challenge and to react to it with curiosity is not related to a trained disposition to apply aggressive coping with social conflict situations.

To our knowledge, r-Pearson correlation coefficients are at a weak and low level; however, they are statistically relevant (p < 0.001) and reinforce the statement that teenagers who apply an aggressive strategy while coping with a social conflict appear to be susceptible to experiencing anger and fear of a diversified origin (as a state or a trait). It means that in situations of a social conflict they are prone to react with negative emotions (anger, fear). Based on this statistical analysis, the hypothesis H1 can be considered positively verified.

The characteristics of the relationship between the coping strategies used by parents – mothers and fathers – (SRwSK) and an aggressive coping strategy employed by their adolescents in social conflict situations (KSRK) have been set by means of a coefficient of Pearson’s r correlation. The results of the application of this method are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Coefficients of Pearson’s r correlation between the results of the SRwSK questionnaire and the Aggression (AG) scale of the KSMK questionnaire for the whole group, for girls, and for boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales of the SRwSK questionnaire</th>
<th>AG scale of the KSMK questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls (n = 468)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys (n = 425)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (n = 893)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>0.56**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>0.33***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evasive strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>0.17***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>–0.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>–0.13***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity-based strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>–0.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>–0.20***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SRwSK = a questionnaire to study parents’ coping strategies in social conflict situations in the child’s perception; KSMK = a questionnaire to study adolescents’ coping strategies in social conflict situations; AG = aggressive coping; Pearson parametric correlations (2-tailed) were used. *** p < 0.001. ** p < 0.01. * p < 0.05.
The coefficients of correlation between aggressive coping strategies employed by adolescents and their mothers’ coping strategies indicate the presence of significant dependence in terms of an aggressive coping strategy used by the mothers in a group of adolescents ($r = 0.49$) and in terms of the same strategy in the groups of girls ($r = 0.56$) and boys ($r = 0.41$). Correlation coefficients that occur between the aggressive coping strategy of the mothers and their adolescents’ aggressive coping are moderate. In addition, mothers who in social conflict situations apply a strategy that involves avoiding problems have their share in the shaping of an aggressive coping strategy of their adolescents ($r = 0.17$).

It is worth mentioning that the relationship between the strategy involving avoiding conflicts used by mothers in the perception of their adolescents and the level of their aggressive strategies has proven to be weak and almost irrelevant. In contrast, submission and activity-based strategies presented by mothers have obtained a negative indicator both in the group of adolescents (S: $r = -0.11$; AC: $r = -0.39$) and in the groups of girls (S: $r = -0.13$; AC: $r = -0.43$) and boys (S: $r = -0.10$; AC: $r = -0.35$) who apply aggressive strategies in social conflict situations.

The obtained coefficients of correlation between adolescents’ aggressive strategy and their fathers’ coping strategies indicate the presence of significant dependence in terms of fathers’ strategy of aggressive nature in the group of adolescents ($r = 0.31$) and in terms of the same strategy in the groups of girls ($r = 0.33$) and boys ($r = 0.30$). However, the correlation coefficients that occur between fathers’ aggressive coping strategy and adolescents’ aggressive coping are not high. The relationship in terms of the strategy involving avoiding conflicts used by fathers takes a negative value in the group of adolescents ($r = -0.10$) and in the group of girls ($r = -0.15$) who show a trained disposition to an aggressive way of coping with social conflict situations. Similarly, a negative indicator was obtained for the relationship between fathers’ activity-based strategy and an aggressive strategy both in the group of adolescents ($r = -0.20$) and in the groups of girls ($r = -0.20$) and boys ($r = -0.22$). A lack of a significant relationship between the strategy of submissive coping employed by fathers and their adolescents’ aggressive coping strategy (for the whole group and for boys and girls separately) in situations of a social conflict has been observed.

Considering the obtained research results, they can be regarded as supporting the hypothesis H2.

Stepwise multiple regression analysis has been conducted to more thoroughly study the way the set of emotional and family variables co-determines the level of an aggressive coping strategy applied by adolescents in social conflict situations. The results in the AG scale of the KSMK questionnaire have been adopted as a dependent variable, while the set of independent variables includes the results in six scales (Anger – state and Anger – trait, Fear – state and Fear – trait, and Curiosity – state and Curiosity – trait) of the TISCO Inventory and in four scales (Aggressive coping (AG), Evasive coping (E), Submissive coping (S), and Activity-based coping (AC) in social conflict situations) of the SRwSK questionnaire in the “My mother” and “My father” versions. Table 3 presents the results.
Table 3
Stepwise multiple regression of the Aggression (AG) scale results of the KSMK questionnaire against the TISCO Inventory and SRwSK scales in the “My mother” and “My father” versions: for the whole group and for groups of girls and boys separately

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People surveyed</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Level  p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total (n = 893)</td>
<td>Anger-state</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>0.0005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anger-trait</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AG mother</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S mother</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td>−3.38</td>
<td>0.0008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AC mother</td>
<td>−0.23</td>
<td>−5.79</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E father</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>−3.75</td>
<td>0.0002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AC father</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>−3.59</td>
<td>0.0004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free Ind.</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(R^2 = 0.32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(F(7.885) = 59.22) ((p &lt; 0.0001))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls (n = 468)</td>
<td>Anger-trait</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AG mother</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>8.72</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AC mother</td>
<td>−0.17</td>
<td>−3.99</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free Ind.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(R^2 = 0.34)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(F(3.464) = 79.19) ((p &lt; 0.0001))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys (n = 425)</td>
<td>Anger-trait</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AG mother</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>5.34</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AC mother</td>
<td>−0.17</td>
<td>−3.69</td>
<td>0.0003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free Ind.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(R^2 = 0.23)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(F(3.421) = 42.86) ((p &lt; 0.0001))</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Dependent variable Aggression (AG) of the KSMK; AG = an aggressive strategy in social conflict situations; E = an evasive strategy in social conflict situations; S = a submission strategy in social conflict situations, AC = an activity-based strategy in social conflict situations.

The first analysis was based on the results of the whole respondent group regardless of their sex. As Table 3 shows, seven variables significantly affect adolescents’ aggressive coping strategy in social conflict situations: anger as a current state of emotions, anger
as a personality trait, an aggressive strategy, a submission strategy and an activity-based strategy employed by the mother and an evasive strategy and an activity-based strategy applied by the father. Other variables considered in the study proved to be irrelevant determinants of an aggressive strategy employed by adolescents in a conflict. The multiple determination coefficient is $R^2 = 0.32$ and it shows that a 32-percent variance of the dependent variable “adolescents’ aggressive coping strategy in a conflict” has been explained by the impact of the adopted set of independent variables. Beta values indicate that the higher the level of anger felt as a temporary emotional state experienced in relation to social conflict situations, the higher the level of anger as a personality trait, the higher the level of the mother’s aggressive strategy in social conflict situations and the lower the level of destructive strategies (evasion, submission) used by the mother and the father, the lower the level of an activity-based strategy employed by the mother and the father, then the higher the level of aggression as adolescents’ coping strategy in social conflict situations is.

Separate analyses were conducted for groups distinguished by gender (cf. Table 3). Calculations show that anger as a personality trait, an aggressive strategy and an activity-based strategy of the mother play an important determining role for girls’ adopting an aggressive coping strategy in conflicts. The multiple determination coefficient shows that 34% of variability of an aggressive way to cope in social conflict situations in girls has been explained by the impact of the adopted set of independent variables. Other variables considered in the study proved to be irrelevant determinants of an aggressive strategy in the group of girls. Regression equation parameters, including its relevance, suggest, however, that a higher level of a trained disposition to respond with anger, a higher level of the mother’s aggressive strategy and a lower level of the mother’s activity-based strategy in social conflict situations have a significant influence on the level of girls’ aggressive coping strategies in social conflict situations.

In addition, it was verified which set of independent emotional and family variables affects the level of an aggressive strategy in social conflict situations among boys. Out of fourteen independent variables, three were relevant in the regression equation. They are anger as a personality trait, the mother’s aggressive and activity-based strategies. The multiple determination coefficient is not high ($R^2 = 0.23$), which means that there may exist a relatively large number of other variables codetermining the level of boys’ aggressive coping strategies in social conflict situations. Beta values indicate that the higher the level of anger understood as a relatively constant personality trait, the higher the level of the mother’s aggressive coping strategy and the lower the level of an activity-based strategy used by the mother in social conflict situations, then the higher the level of boys’ aggressive coping strategies in social conflict situations.

Summing up the performed analysis of regression, one should state that the assumed emotional and family variables are not strong predictors of an aggressive strategy employed by adolescents to cope in social conflict situations, which means that there may
exist a relatively large number of other variables codetermining the level of adolescents’ aggressive coping strategy used in social conflict situations. The performed statistical verification enables us to state that the obtained results allow to adopt the last research hypothesis H3.

**Discussion**

Analysis of the collected research material enables us to draw a conclusion that, first and foremost, anger as an emotional state caused by a conflict and a trained disposition to respond with anger influence the choice of an aggressive coping strategy in social conflict situations. It can be assumed that a growing level of anger and the feature of anger will increase the intensity of adolescents’ aggressive coping strategy (taking both the group as a whole and the groups distinguished by gender separately) in situations of a social conflict (Pufal-Struzik, 1997; Terelak, 2001; Łosiak, 2009). In addition, significant positive correlations have been observed between boys’ aggressive coping strategy and fear as a current state of emotions experienced in social conflict situations and fear as a personality trait. As it turns out, it is boys who are more prone to experiencing fear of various origin (as a state or a trait) in social conflict situations. One can expect that the higher the level of fear of various origin (as a state or a trait), the more intensive the aggressive coping strategy used by boys in situations of a social conflict (Kubacka-Jasiecka, 1986; Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Cywińska, 2013). Why no similar relationships in respect of girls have been noted is surprising. Making an attempt to explain this phenomenon one may refer to forms of aggressive behaviours. It can be assumed that a high level of fear in girls causes certain forms of indirect aggressive behaviours involving a distrustful, unfavourable or hostile attitude to the environment (Harwas-Napierała, 1987; Ranschurg, 1993; Leary & Kowalski, 2001; Nitendel-Bujakowa, 2001).

Analysis of the presented research results has revealed that mothers and fathers who apply a strategy based on aggression contribute to their offspring’s modelling of strategies with aggressive behaviour in social conflict situations (Rostowska, 1996; Wolińska, 2000; Bryłka, 2000). Parents equip their adolescent children with aggressive patterns to respond to a conflict (Ratzke, Sanders, Diepold, Krannich, & Cierpka, 1997; Barlög, 2001; Cywińska, 2005; Filip, 2013). Daughters and sons learn these patterns by observing their mother’s and father’s behaviours when there is some threat to the realization of their own endeavours. Adolescents adopt aggressive forms of behaviour from their family environment and treat them as effective ways to solve problems, achieve their objectives or cope with conflict situations (Patterson, 1986; Obuchowska, 2001; Urban, 2005). It is worth paying attention to adolescent girls’ and boys’ interactions conductive to learning an aggressive coping strategy in conflict situations from a parent of the opposite sex. One may refer to the principles of the socio-cultural theory of identification which claims that teenagers’ socialization is influenced by personality traits of the parent with whom
they identify themselves, and not the conformity to the model’s sex and the identifying person (compare: Rychlak & Legerński, 1967).

The presented results of the research confirmed the validity of the adopted research hypotheses. To generalize these results, one can conclude that aggression helps adolescents to relieve their negative emotions manifested in situations posing some threat to the fulfilment of their goals. This strategy is, first and foremost, a form of coping with anger felt in social conflict situations. It should also be noted that a growing level of adolescents’ anger-disposition in social conflict situations increases the intensity of an aggressive coping strategy applied by them. This means that a trained disposition to perceive situations in which personal aspirations are contrary to the aspirations of others as threatening and responding to them with anger is associated with a higher level of an aggressive coping strategy in social conflict situations. It should also be noted that the search for determinants of aggressive coping strategies within fear as a state and fear as a feature has given the desired result for boys. An increase in the level of fear of various origin (as a state or a trait) is associated with an increase of boys’ aggression in situations with some threat to the fulfilment of their goals or accomplishment of their objectives. However, in girls, accumulation of fear may be the cause of alloplastic forms of coping with fear, for instance, hostility. In addition, the modelling process is significant to the development of aggressive habits to respond to negative emotions originating in social conflict situations. An adolescent learns, among other things, aggressive coping in social conflict situations by observing his/her parents who manifest such behaviour in social conflict situations and due to a frequent contact with them, – thus, through social learning. The conducted research has revealed that a high value of parents’ aggressive coping strategies causes an increase in their offspring’s aggressive coping strategies in conflict situations. In general, the family can be said to teach a young person aggressive forms of coping with their negative emotions felt in social conflict situations.

Analysis of the research results confirms that in addition to a number of factors that could potentially affect the level of an aggressive strategy employed by adolescents in social conflict situations, this strategy is primarily supported by higher levels of situational anger and a higher level of a trained disposition to respond with anger and it provides adolescent children with patterns of their parents’ aggressive response to the conflict.

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Agresyvi gimnazistų įveikos strategija socialinių konfliktų situacijose: emociniai ir šeimos veiksniai

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Santrauka


Esminiai žodžiai: bendrojo ugdymo mokyklų paaugliai, emocinės reakcijos, modeliuojantis elgesys, agresyvi įveikos strategija, socialinio konfliktu situacijos.

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