

AGGRESSIVENESS AND ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

Assertiveness can be described as a phenomenon that involves assertive expression of ideas, feelings and boundaries while respecting the rights of others, while maintaining a positive impact on the partner. Assertiveness is an important component of professionalism in professions that are related to work with people. The opposite of assertiveness is aggressive behaviour. The purpose of this study is to establish the ratio of assertiveness and aggressive behaviour of respondents of different behavioural groups and to explore its relation to the age factor. The participants of this study were student – teachers from the regional university of Latvia. The entire sample was divided into two groups based on age. The first group included participants under 30 years old. The second group was comprised of participants in the age group older than 30. Based on the results gained in the assertiveness test, the subgroups of so-called passive, assertive and aggressive respondents were singled out. The second test determined the structure and the level of aggressiveness of respondents in each of the selected groups. The results indicate that aggressive behavior is inherent in representatives from each group. The difference lies in the ratio of assertiveness and aggression, as well as in the degree of influence of self-aggression in the overall structure of aggressiveness of an individual.

Keywords: *Teachers, assertiveness, passivity, aggressiveness, self-aggression.*

1. Introduction

Assertiveness is a relative new term in psychology and refers to adaptive personality traits. The concept was formed in late 50's of the 20st century and is based on humanistic psychology and transaction analyses. Assertive people freely express their ideas and feelings not limiting oneself to rituals and conventions. Assertive behaviour can be visible in interaction when an individual flexibly changes his/her behaviour according to context, politely defend his/her opinion, also accepts and provides feedback. The concept is an alternative to passive and aggressive type of behaviour. Assertiveness relates to person's ability to pursue his/her goals without violating the rights of other people. Salter (2002) refer assertiveness to confidence in one's self effectiveness and self-worth, autonomy and independence from external influences. Assertiveness can be described as a subjective personal quality charactered by initiative and risk taking in novel life situations, one's ability to make freely decisions by taking into account the rights of other participants. Confident people can express their feelings without aggression, they have flexible thinking. According to Tanck and Robbins (2008), assertive people are sociable and can easily overcome situations related to high stress.

It is a phenomenon that involves persuasive expression of ideas, feelings, and boundaries while respecting the rights of others, maintaining a positive impact on the communication partner by considering possible consequences of interaction (Pfafman, 2020).

The need to study assertive behavior emerged after the Second World War. In 1954, the book of the American scientist Abraham Maslow "Motivation and Personality" was published that he presented to the scientific community as a complete version of his concept of hierarchy of human needs. The highest need in his concept was the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1954). Self-actualization is a person's desire to realize his/her personal potential in life. Along with criticism, this concept has generated an interest to focus on the phenomenon of self-actualization. Assertive behavior was presented as a main aim in achieving the goals of self-actualization.

A renewed interest in assertive behaviour is being observed today in the international research. This can be explained by the fact that in professions that require communication, like (medicine, pedagogy, politics, public administration), professionalism is associated with assertive behavior in the communication processes. Researchers have found out that assertiveness is a communicative personality

trait and, according researchers, it can be obtained most often as a result of social or special learning (Parray, Kumar & David, 2020). This expanded the age limit of respondents. Today, a separate direction of study of assertive behavior is focus on characteristics and causes and manifestations of assertive behaviour among adolescents (Gading, 2020; Gultekin, Ozdemir, Budak, 2018; Kumar, Fernandez, 2017; Prabha, Babu, 2021 and others).

A number of studies in recent decades confirm a negative relationship between assertiveness and anxiety of an individual (Niusha, Farghadani, Safari, 2012 and others). This can also be noted that assertiveness increases a motivation to reach academic achievement (Galata, 2018). Assertive personalities show higher results in life satisfaction tests (Galata, 2018) and assertive behavior reduces the level of anxiety (Fornell, Westbrook, 1979).

Researchers assert that assertiveness is located between two poles of social behavior: passivity and aggressiveness (Postolati, 2017). One the one pole of the behavioral repertoire there is a passivity and at the other end - aggressiveness, suggesting the existence of three types of personalities: assertive and non-assertive (including passive and aggressive personality types) (Sheinov, 2014). It should be noted that assertive behavior can be perceived as aggressive. But, as Chamberlain concludes, aggression is understood as instrumental, but not as hostile (Chamberlain, 2009). Are there individuals who possess only assertive behavior or the ones who possess aggressive behavior? Research indicates that it is about the relationship between two types of behavior. Research shows that when assertiveness is taught, the level of aggressiveness decreases but does not disappear (Mofrad & Mehrabi, 2015). Researchers explain this phenomenon by the fact that instrumental aggression is part of our culture (Fornell and Westbrook, 1979). The ratio of assertive and aggressive behavior seems to depend on the role of emotions on the choice of the method of reaction to a conflict situation (Tankamani & Jalali, 2017).

The level of aggressiveness increases in the absence of experience of assertive behavior (Yuliani, Etika, Suharto & Nurseskasatmata, 2020). The researchers also indicate to the boundary between assertiveness and aggressiveness (as well as between assertiveness and passivity) that depends on the norms accepted in the society that can change when moving from one culture to another (Margalit, & Mauger, 1984). Aggression is highly studied area in psychology, particularly in relation to adolescent aggression, adult aggression and violence. Aggressive behaviour can be conceptualized as observable manifestation of aggression, act intended to cause harm or pain. The term aggressive behaviour also includes verbal, psychological, and other means of causing pain. In adulthood aggression can escalate even into more violent acts, such as abuse and homicide.

The hypothesis of this study is based on the analysis of assertiveness studies and is formulated in a following way: assertive people behave aggressively. Only the ratio of assertiveness and aggressiveness is different for assertive people as compared with non-assertive individuals.

2. Methodology

In order to measure assertiveness, the authors have applied the test by Sheinov (2014). The test consists of 26 statements that were measured with the Lickert scale (always - 1 point, often - 2 points, rarely - 3 points and never - 4 points). According to the results of the test, respondents are divided into three groups: passive, assertive and aggressive. An example of the statement from this test is as following: *I don't know how to get acquainted with people to whom I feel sympathy for. I'm waiting for them to undertake the first step.*

Aggressiveness was measured by the use of a questionnaire designed by L.G. Pochebut (Platonov, 2003). The questionnaire consists of five scales that includes the following levels: verbal, physical, objective, emotional aggression, as well as self-aggression. Each scale consists of eight statements that must be answered either in an affirmative or negative way. The answers that match the key are rated by 1 point. The overall level of aggressiveness is determined by the sum of the points in each scale. The example of a statement from the self-aggression scale is as following: *when remembering my past experience, I get offended.*

The number of participants who were involved in the experiment reached seventy four 1st year students from the Faculty of Education and Management of regional university in Latvia who are enrolled in educational programmes. Among them were 69 female and 5 male students. Gender disparity was due to a specialization traditionally chosen by female students.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Participants of this study have received questionnaires and replied to the researchers by e-mail. When processing the obtained results, the sample was divided into two parts: young participants (below 30 years) and experienced (older than 30). Data regarding the age of the respondents is reflected in Table 1.

Table 1. The age of the research participants.

Sample	Number	Females/Males	Mean	Mean squared deviation σ
All participants	74	69/5	27.9	9.96
Below 30 years	41	39/2	21.1	3.1
Above 30 years	33	30/3	37.9	8.1

Based on the results gained in this study, all respondents were divided into groups: passive, assertive and aggressive. The tables show the average value of the aggressiveness indicators for each of these groups, as well as standard deviation indicators. The entire sample was divided into two subsamples: in the age group below 30 and above 30.

3. Results

Tables 2 and 3 reflect the results of a study about the level of manifestation of aggression among the respondents who belong to different groups, which were compiled on the basis of the data obtained from the assertiveness test.

Table 2. Average aggressiveness of respondents from different groups in the age group until 30.

Groups of research participants Type of aggression	Passive N=17 Mean (σ)	Aggressive N=18 Mean (σ)	Aaggressive N=6 Mean (σ)
General	13,3 (4,54)	12,4 (3,9)	11,8 (5,19)
Verbal	2,2 (1,48)	2,8 (1,65)	3,2 (1,47)
Physical	1,5 (2,0)	1,8 (2,06)	2,8 (2,23)
Aggression against the physical environment	2,8 (0,75)	1,8 (1,22)	2,0 (1,43)
Emotional	2,5 (0,87)	2,0 (1,23)	2,0 (0,89)
Self- aggression	4,3 (1,4)	4,0 (0,53)	1,8 (2,14)

Table 3. Average indicators of aggressiveness among respondents from different groups above 30.

Groups of research participants Type of aggression	Passive N=10 Mean (σ)	Aassertive N=17 Mean (σ)	Aggressive N=6 Mean (σ)
General	13,2 (3,8)	9,5 (4,81)	8,3 (3,5)
Verbal	2,5 (1,7)	2,25 (2,05)	1,5 (1,22)
Physical	0,8 (0,78)	1,75 (1,71)	0,8 (0,98)
Aggression against the physical environment	2,6 (1,07)	2,2 (1,19)	1,5 (1,38)
Emotional	2,4 (0,52)	1,25 (0,62)	2,0 (0,89)
Self-aggression	5,0 (2,05)	2,3 (1,5)	2,7 (1,03)

4. Discussion

At the first glance, the authors have obtained a paradoxical result. According to the theoretical bases of assertiveness, for the so-called aggressive respondents, the level of their aggressiveness should exceed the corresponding level of assertiveness. But the research data indicates that the highest level of aggressiveness is manifested among the participants of the group of so-called passive respondents.

For the assertive and aggressive individuals, aggressiveness is lower. At the same time, the decreased level of aggressiveness for the assertive and aggressive individuals in the age group above 30, it is more pronounced than in the group of respondents in the age group below 30.

The level of verbal aggression in all groups of respondents is low. In the age group of participants under 30, when switching from passive to assertive and aggressive individuals, aggression tends to increase, but in the age group above 30 - to decrease.

The indicators of physical aggression obtained in this study is low. They reach their maximum value in the group of aggressive respondents below 30. The level of objective aggression is low in all groups of respondents and trends to decrease from passive respondents to assertive and aggressive ones.

In regards to emotional aggression, the lowest rates are obtained in the group of assertive respondents in the age category above 30. In the group of respondents in the age category above 30, the lowest rates were among aggressive individuals and the highest among the participants of passive group.

The highest rates are gained in the subscale of self-aggression. For the passive and assertive respondents in the age group above 30 and for the passive respondents from in the age group above 30, who have exceeded the average values (according to the criteria proposed by the author of the test). For the aggressive respondents in the age group above 30 and in the age group below 30, self-aggression indicators were low.

The results obtained in this study indicate that the ideas about assertiveness proposed by the authors in early written theories, there is a need of modification of the notion of aggressiveness. It must be also emphasized that aggressive behaviour is also common among both, passive and assertive respondents. These groups differ from two types of behavior described above, as well as in regards the structure of aggressiveness.

The highest scores on general aggressiveness were observed among passive, assertive and aggressive respondents from the age group above 30, as well as among passive respondents in the age group below 30.

At the same time, for the groups of passive and assertive respondents above 30 and passive respondents below 30, self-aggressiveness had the greatest contribution to the overall assessment of aggressiveness. This allows to conclude that the reason for the passivity of respondents may lie in self-aggression, or in doubts about their abilities. In the transition to assertive behavior, this reason for behaviour decreases since the professional experience is being obtained.

Self-aggression is one of the causes of professional burnout. An increased level of self-aggression in passive and assertive respondents in the age group above 30, continuously increases for this type of aggression among passive respondents in the age group below 30. It might be related to difficulty in regards to a professional growth when there is a choice for the alternative behavior.

There are three choices: to remain passive and to become dissatisfied with the chosen profession (an increased level of self-aggression persists); to improve the skills of assertive behavior or to use aggressive techniques in professional communication. The second path seems to involve an intermediate stage, when the increased level of aggression persists for some time. The dominant is the third way of expression of verbal aggression and self-aggression.

Limitations of the research. Firstly, the representatives of only one profession took part in the study (almost all participants work in the educational institutions simultaneously combining work with their studies at the university). There might be a possibility that in a sample comprised of medical workers, officials or police officers, the authors could obtain different results. Secondly, almost the entire sample consisted of female participants. Thirdly, the size of the sample was limited to students of the same course. Similar results could be obtained while doing the follow up research.

5. Conclusions

Aggressive behavior is inherent in representatives of all three groups of respondents: passive, assertive and aggressive. Differences are manifested only in the ratio of these two types of behavior, as well as in the structure of aggressiveness.

In the structure of aggressive behavior of passive and assertive respondents in the age group above 30 and passive respondents in the age group below 30, self-aggression dominates. This can provoke stressful situations and subsequently, professional burnout.

Improving the skills of assertive behavior may involve a transitional time, when the level of assertiveness increases while maintaining the level of aggressiveness.

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