

Avoidance Coping Strategy in Adolescents in a Social Conflict Situation with Respect to Cognitive Correlates

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Abstract

The aim of the research was to search for cognitive correlates of avoidance coping strategies used by adolescents in a social conflict situation. The following tools have been used in the research: The Self-Esteem Scale (SES) developed by M. Rosenberg, adapted by M. Łaguna, K. Lachowicz-Tabaczek & I. Dzwonkowska, The Sense of Control Questionnaire (Polish: KBPK - Kwestionariusz do Badania Poczucia Kontroli) by G. Krasowicz & A. Kurzyp-Wojnarska, as well as the original Questionnaire to study adolescents' coping strategies employed in social conflict situations (Polish: KSMK- Kwestionariusz do badania strategii radzenia sobie młodzieży w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego) developed by D. Borecka-Biernat. The empirical research was carried out in junior high schools (Polish: gimnazjum). The research involved 893 adolescents (468 girls and 425 boys) aged 13-15. The research results analysis indicates that in adolescents, lower appraisal of one's potential co-occurs with the avoidance coping strategy in a social conflict situation. The research also indicated that a strong belief in the influence of others on the positive and negative results of events strengthens the avoidance strategy of coping with a social conflict situation in adolescents.

Key words

adolescents, self-esteem, locus of control, avoidance coping strategy, a social conflict situation

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Introduction

A conflict situation with another human being is one of the basic social situations in all of our lives. The word 'conflict' originates from the Latin noun *confligere*, *conflictatio*, meaning to strike together, a dispute, discussion, fight or a collision of two or more processes, powers specific to living creatures. 'Striking together' may begin a fight. Many people wrongly associate conflict solely with direct physical and/or verbal aggression and accompanying hostility, escalating the existing contradictions. This type of conflict is full of negative emotions. However, most phenomena that might be described as conflicts have relatively mild forms, e.g. a short quarrel, a discussion or a debate (Olubiński, 1992). In the context of interpersonal relationships, a conflict situation shows some type of an interaction between interlocutors in which they clearly realise their divergent interests, needs or pursuits (Balawajder, 2010).

Adolescence is a period in which youth experience various, often contradictory pursuits and a need to cope with inconsistent social expectations directed towards them. The results of research indicate that adolescents in this period consider interpersonal conflicts, including conflicts with teachers, arguments with school mates or romantic partners as well as quarrels with one or both parents or other members of the family, as the source of strong emotional arousal of a negative nature (Gawryś, 2002; Gurba, 2020; Guskowska et al., 2001; Honness et al., 1997; Lachowska, 2010; Lohman & Jarvis, 2000; Polak, 2010; Rostowska, 2001; Różańska-Kowal, 2004; Smetana & Dadais, 2002). The most problematic situations between students and teachers are connected with school grades, insensitive behaviour, controlling and oppressive attitude, and inflexible expectations on the teacher's part (Stańkowki, 2009). The main reasons for quarrels with peers are taunts, mocking, false accusations, betrayal, indiscretion, or impolite behaviour, as well as competing for grades, interest of the opposite sex, position among classmates and reputation (Komendant, 2007). Conflict is an inherent part of families with adolescent children (Brzezińska et al, 2016). The majority of problems that arise in mutual understanding between the parents and the children emerge as a result of changes in the adolescent's attitude towards parents. Young people become less open in their interactions with parents, while parents are frequently unable to cope with the increasing autonomy of their children and try to impose limitations. Many of those conflicts arise in ordinary daily situations, such as differing opinions and preferences regarding clothes, music, free time activities, or the young person's tendency to return home late in the evening (Garstka, 2011; Jaworski, 2000; Riesch et al, 2000). The adolescent's increased need to be independent clashes with the

standards, expectations, and limitations established by the parents, and with their tendency to control and supervise the life and behaviour of their children.

Social conflict situations are classified as difficult situations in social interactions. They accompany people in every period of their lives. Since birth, each human being needs to learn to cope with difficulties and challenges they face. A difficult situation encourages a young person to take action oriented towards regaining the balance between expectations and abilities, and/or towards the improvement of their emotional state. The activity undertaken by a young person in a difficult situation is viewed, in a particular situational context, as a coping strategy used in a current difficult situation (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000; Wrześniewski 1996). The ability of coping with a situation of social conflict may take on a form of a destructive strategy (Balawajder, 2010; Deutsch, 2005; Donaldson et al., 2000; Kobus-Reyes, 2000; Pisula & Sikora, 2008; Rostowska, 2001). Destructive coping strategies in situations of social conflict, such as defensive behaviours, are not oriented towards resolution and overcoming the situation of conflict, do not lead towards achieving understanding, escalate hostile behaviours, and allow the individual to decrease the unpleasant emotional tension. The aspiration to achieve a specific goal is replaced by the desire to decrease the unpleasant tension and restore good mood. It is accomplished by avoiding confrontation with a social conflict situation, escaping, withdrawing from the situation, staying out of contact with it, avoiding thinking and experiencing the situation by ignoring the problem, engaging in replacement activities focusing attention and distracting the individual from the conflict situation (thinking about pleasant matters, daydreaming, listening to music, doing sport, playing computer games, surfing the Internet, walking, sleeping), as well as looking for contact with other people.

The empirical material in the literature indicates that adolescents have at their disposal a considerable number of strategies for coping with social conflict situations which take place at school, in peer relationships, or at home (Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Donaldson et al., 2000; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1999; Lachowska, 2010; Sikora & Pisula, 2002; Trylińska-Tekielska, 2007). Among the coping strategies mentioned by young people in the context of difficult situations at school, we can distinguish attempts at diverting attention from a difficult situation and dealing with something else (surfing on social networking services or being 'glued' to the screen of a phone or tablet), for example, escaping from a difficult situation by physically moving away or isolating from it. Adolescents are also characterised by passive waiting and deceiving themselves that time will solve the problem on its own (Polak, 2010; Sikorski, 2015).

The results of the research cited by E. Frydenberg and R. Lewis (1999) and G. Miłkowska (2010) showed that in a situation of conflict with peers, young people use a coping strategy based on giving up, taking no action, avoiding the problem, and distancing themselves from difficult relationships with others. This means that withdrawing behaviour is connected with the necessity to make concessions and to resign. They reflect the act of an adolescent removing themselves from a conflict situation. As a result of the conducted research, M. Raffaelli (1990, cited from Collins & Laursen, 1992) found that in descriptions of conflicts with peers, the resolution of disputes included withdrawal in 54% of cases.

Conflicts which occur in child-parent relations constitute a common phenomenon during the period of adolescence (Gurba, 2020; Jaworski, 2000). The data obtained by A. Filip (2010), I. Obuchowska (1990), and J. Smetana et al. (1991) show that the behaviour of adolescents in a situation of conflict with their mothers and fathers is characterised by withdrawal and being passive. Adolescents try to avoid family problems or mentally distance themselves from them by looking for contact with other people in non-family structures.

The quoted review of research on methods for coping with a social conflict situation shows that some young people, when faced with a dispute at school, in peer relationships, or at home, adopt a destructive strategy in the form of avoiding reaction to a conflict.

As mentioned, situations of social conflict are connected with the problem of avoidant coping strategies in a specific situational context, applied in order to avoid or minimise the tension, loss, or unfavourable outcome. Why do young people in situations of social conflict choose the strategy of avoiding reacting to difficulties? According to M. 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. One’s perception of the world, their attitudes and expectations towards themselves, other people, tasks, and results of their activity, define the cognitive and emotional perception and interpretation of a difficult situation, which in turn influence behaviour in such a situation. A range of conceptions and images about oneself as well as expectations towards oneself, in other words the structure ‘me’, plays a significant role in human behaviour seen in difficult situations (Kulas, 1986). Information pertaining to oneself and traits constituting knowledge about oneself are the premise to assess one’s capabilities in difficult situations. Self-esteem is inseparably

connected with self-concept; it is the appraising and evaluating component of the system of a person's knowledge about 'me'. It is usually defined as a positive or a negative attitude towards oneself (Gregg, 2003). High self-esteem, in the view of M. Rosenberg (1965), is equal to the conviction that one is a good and a valuable person, whereas low self-esteem is equated with dissatisfaction with oneself or the rejection of one's 'me'. The influence of self-esteem is visible in the functioning of an individual in difficult situations. However, human activity in difficult situations depends not only on what the individual is like in reality, which means what qualities and capabilities are peculiar to the individual, but also on the way he or she perceives and appraises those features. As it turns out, the unfavourable, inadequately organised and inaccurate structure 'me' is threatened in a difficult situation, which leads to a shift of the goal of an activity towards the defence of one's 'me' (Tyszkowa, 1986). It leads to disorganisation of an activity directed towards the goal. Low (adequate or inadequate) and high (inadequate) self-esteem play an unfavourable role in young people's behaviour in difficult situations (Borecka-Biernat, 2006; Brytek, 2007; Kubacka-Jasiecka, 1986; Ogińska-Bulik, 2001). When an individual faces a difficult situation, inadequate self-esteem leads to an increase of the feeling of a personal threat, negative emotions, as well as the disorganisation of behaviour. In the case of low self-esteem, the tendency to resign from achieving the goal, refraining from activities, and withdrawal from social interaction may occur. An individual who appraises themselves negatively has a tendency to overrate difficulties and is rather ready to surrender to them than struggle with them (Tyszkowa, 1986). Lack of faith in one's powers, lack of resolve and self-confidence, willingness to resign from activities as a result of experienced failures impedes overcoming tensions and prevents solving conflict situations in people with low self-esteem (Kozielecki, 1981; Wosińska, 2004). Therefore, low self-esteem lowers mental resistance to difficult situations, lowers the effectiveness of activities, and inhibits adaptation or coping with a difficult situation. A tiny obstacle or a little threat in people with low self-esteem may provoke a tendency to withdraw from cooperation with others and avoid contacts with people.

An individual's active influence on the surrounding reality depends not only on the objective conditions in a particular situation, but also on the individual's general belief that their outcomes depend on their actions. 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. The locus of control is understood as a cognitive style, a dimension of personality or its trait connected with

the perceived source of control of an individual's behaviour (Reber & Reber, 2005). An individual's subjective convictions concerning their control over the surrounding world are important variable conditioning behaviour in difficult situations. Where an individual acts in situations in which the successes and failures encountered are treated as consequences of forces being beyond their personal control, this is referred to as the sense of external control. However, if the outcome of actions depends on one's behaviour and skills, then it is referred to as the sense of internal control (Drwal, 1978; Oleś, 2003; Rotter, 1954). Locus of control determines strategies of human behaviour, since in the selection of correlation situation, as in the course of the conflict itself, the individual pursues to perform such a type of control that is specific to them (Dowhan & Sadowska, 1996). Different forms of the ability to control a situation or the belief in having such an ability is a crucial, individual factor modifying the functioning of a young person in difficult situations, determining the applied strategies of coping with problems (Krause & Stryker, 1984; Ogińska-Bulik, 2001; Talik, 2010). People with external locus of control function worse in difficult situations. Most often, they believe that they are unable to influence the outcomes of their own behaviour, therefore, they will not be motivated to change their behaviour in order to increase the likelihood of reaching a goal. Consequently, those who believe that their activity does not influence their achievements, and the outcome of their actions is perceived as being beyond their control, when finding themselves in a difficult situation do not make any effort to solve it, as they do not believe that they are capable of changing it. This leads to adopting destructive strategies and applying them routinely in a difficult situation. The results of research, referred to by D. Borecka-Biernat (2006), P. Kurtek (2005), and T. Rostowska (2001) indicated that people who are convinced that their activities do not influence their achievements to a great extent, and that the outcome of their actions is perceived as being beyond their control, when they find themselves in stressful confrontations that they appraise as not vulnerable to personal control, adopt distancing or remedial escape-avoidance strategies. This means that their lack of belief in the possibility to influence life events prevents them from being able to cope with difficulties occurring in socially organised system of human activity whose aim is to satisfy people's needs. A person with an external locus of control, in a difficult situation of a social interaction nature, concentrates on themselves, prepares to defend the threatened 'me' by distancing, thus escaping from the problem without attempting to solve it.

The research problem and hypotheses

The empirical research was focused on the cognitive determinants of avoidance coping strategy used by youths in a social conflict situation, with a particular emphasis put on the role of the level of self-esteem and the locus of control. The research aimed at answering the following research questions:

1. Is there any dependence between the level of self-esteem and the use of avoidance coping strategies in adolescents in a social conflict situation, and if so, what form does this dependence take?
2. Is there a relationship between the locus of control and the use of avoidance coping strategies in adolescents in a social conflict situation, and if so, what is it?

These research questions allow us to formulate the following hypotheses, which will be verified through an analysis of conducted empirical research:

- H1: Adolescents with a low level of self-esteem more often apply avoidance strategies in a social conflict situation.
- H2: Adolescents with external locus of control more often manifest avoidance strategies in a social conflict situation.

The methodology of individual research

The following methods have been used in the research:

The Self-Esteem Scale (SES) by M. Rosenberg adapted by M. Łaguna, K. Lachowicz-Tabaczek & I. Dzwonkowska (2007) allows to calculate the level of general (global) self-esteem both in adolescents and adults. SES consists of ten diagnostic, descriptive statements concerning oneself, by means of which, the respondent performs a description of one's 'me'. The person answers on a four-point scale. Each answer is assigned 1 to 4 points. Finally, the results range from 10 to 40 points. A high score means a high level of general (global) self-esteem. The Polish version of the SES method is a reliable tool (Cronbach α in different research ranges from 0.81 to 0.83) and its theoretical validity has been confirmed.

The Sense of Control Questionnaire (Polish: KBPK- Kwestionariusz do Badania Poczucia Kontroli) by G. Krasowicz & A. Kurzyp-Wojnarska (1990) consists of 46 forced-choice questions, including 36 diagnostic and 10 buffer ones. The diagnostic questions refer to simple situations connected with adolescent school life. They form two scales: The Scale of Success (S) and The Scale of Failure (F). The questions referring to favourable events are included in the Scale of Success (S)

whereas the questions referring to unfavourable events are included in the Scale of Failure (F). The sum of results obtained from both scales creates the ratio of the generalised sense of control (S+F). Low results obtained in KBPK questionnaire indicate an external sense of control of the consequences of events, whereas high results suggest an internal sense of control of the consequences of events. The questionnaire has satisfying reliability (the internal consistency ratio KR-20 for the Scale of Success is 0.54 and for the Scale of Failure- 0.69) and criterial validity.

The *Questionnaire to study adolescents' coping strategies employed in social conflict situations* (Polish: KSMK) developed by D. Borecka-Biernat (2012) is intended to study the coping strategies used by adolescents in a social conflict situation. It consists of a description of 33 social conflict situations. Each situation is given 4 behaviours describing coping with a social conflict situation. The first one refers to aggressive coping ('AG'), the second to avoidance coping ('A'), the third to submissive coping ('S'), and the fourth to task-oriented (constructive) coping in a social conflict situation ('T'). The results are obtained for each scale separately by summing up marked behaviours in 33 situations being part of a particular scale. For the individual research, the Avoidance coping Scale (A) in adolescents in a social conflict situation has been used. The questionnaire is characterised by satisfactory reliability in terms of the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha). The reliability of the scale of avoidant coping in parents in situations of social conflict as perceived by children ("A") (M: .66; F: .66) is slightly below .70; it can, however, be considered sufficient for research purposes. The questionnaire has a satisfactory level of diagnostic accuracy.

The participants of the research

Before the pandemic, a sample of 468 girls and 425 boys aged 13 to 15 participated in the study – 893 individuals in total. The participants were middle school students. The schools were selected randomly, but not all selected schools agreed to participate in the study; therefore, in several cases other schools were contacted and expressed willingness to participate. The study was conducted in a group and participation was voluntary. The questionnaires were distributed and completed by the students during form period. The students signed the questionnaires with their initials or nicknames. Detailed instructions were given before the questionnaires were distributed and the participants were allowed to ask questions about any elements of the questionnaires that they found unclear. It should be emphasised that the participants displayed a positive attitude towards their participation in the research, expressing interest and actively answering

the questions. The research was carried out in accordance with the rules of psychological scientific research.

Age was the basic criterion for selecting the surveyed students. The influence of age on the selection of strategies for coping with a social conflict situation was analysed in the group of students aged 13–15 years (early adolescence sub-period). Adolescence is an important stage in the life of every human being because it is considered a transition point between childhood and adulthood. The period of adolescence is a period of instability in teenagers' behaviour, a period of conflicts with the environment, with themselves and the feeling of incomprehension which often accompanies them (Obuchowska, 2000). It is also referred to as a period of rebellion and stress. Many biological, psychological, mental, motivational, and social attitude changes take place at that time, which make young people often have many problems with adjusting their behaviour to new situations, tasks, and social roles (Bee, 2004; Brzezińska et al., 2016; Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2015; Trempała, 2011). Due to the development of a critical assessment of the surrounding reality and the increased formation of the self-image, the supremacy of the emotional sphere over other areas of mental life, as well as new forms of social contacts and directness in behaviour, adolescents aged 13–15 seem to be a good subject of research to learn about the avoidance strategy for coping with a situation of strong emotional tension such as a social conflict.

The research results analysis

In order to identify the possible dependencies between the level of self-esteem and the avoidance coping strategy used by adolescents in a social conflict situation, the results of the Self-esteem Scale (SES) and the 'A' Scale (avoidance coping in a social conflict situation) of the KSMK questionnaire have been correlated. Kurtosis and skewness for the analysed data fit within the range (-1,1); the calculations were conducted with a parametric test. Pearson correlation coefficients r for the whole sample of the researched group of adolescents as well as for groups determined by gender are shown in Table 1.

Data from Table 1 indicate a statistically relevant ($p < 0.001$) weak negative correlation between the level of self-esteem and the scale for avoidance coping strategy in a social conflict situation (A) for the whole sample ($r = -0.10$) which is confirmed in the group of boys ($r = -0.21$), however, in the group of girls ($r = -0.007$) the result shows a tendency in the same direction, but it does not reach the level of relevance ($p < 0.05$). It seems likely that the lower the self-esteem, the more often the adolescents (the whole sample, boys) use the avoidance strategy of coping in a conflict situation.

Table 1. Comparison of values of the Pearson correlation coefficient r between the Self-Esteem Scale (SES) and the 'A' Scale of the KSMK questionnaire for the whole sample ($N=893$) for girls only ($N=468$) and for boys only ($N=425$)

SES questionnaire	'A' Scale of the KSMK questionnaire		
	G	Gl	B
Self-Esteem Scale	-0.10 $p<0.004$	-0.007 irr.	-0.21 $p<0.001$

'A': avoidance coping in a social conflict situation; G: general; Gl: girls; B: boys;
irr: irrelevant

Source: Author's research.

The analysis of statistical results from Table 1 suggests that the level of self-esteem and the use of avoidance coping strategy in adolescents in a social conflict situation are not strongly correlated. Gender has not turned out to be a factor determining the strength of relationship between these variables. The empirical research confirmed the validity of the H.1 hypothesis.

The relationship between the locus of control (KBPK) and the use of avoidance coping strategy in adolescents in a social conflict situation (KSMK) is presented with the Pearson's correlation coefficient r . Kurtosis and skewness for the analysed data fit within the range $(-1,1)$. Information concerning the interdependence between the analysed variables is shown in Table 2.

The analysis of data from Table 2 indicates a low correlation between locus of control separately for successes and failures and the generalised sense of control and avoidance coping strategies in youth in a social conflict situation. The correlation coefficients for the entire sample were $r(S)=-0.30$, $r(F)=-0.26$, and $r(S+F)=-0.32$. A clear tendency for two-directional changes of the researched traits can be observed here: the higher the results obtained from the KBPK questionnaire, thus, the stronger the belief in internal control of the consequences of events, separately in success and failure situations and the generalised internal sense of control, then the lower the results for the avoidance strategy. The opposite also appears to be true: lower results in KBPK (a stronger belief in external control of the consequences of events, separately in success and failure, and the generalised internal sense of control) coincide with a higher level of avoidance coping strategy applied by adolescents in a social conflict situation.

Table 2. Comparison of values of the Pearson correlation coefficient r between the KBPK questionnaire Scale and the 'A' Scale of the KSMK questionnaire for the whole sample ($N=893$) as well as for girls only ($N=468$) and for boys only ($N=425$).

KBPK questionnaire Scales	'A' Scale of the KSMK questionnaire		
	G	Gl	B
S	-0.30 $p<0.001$	-0.25 $p<0.001$	-0.36 $p<0.001$
F	-0.26 $p<0.001$	-0.21 $p<0.001$	-0.32 $p<0.001$
S+F	-0.32 $p<0.001$	-0.26 $p<0.001$	-0.40 $p<0.001$

'A': avoidance coping in a social conflict situation; S: The Scale of Success; F: The Scale of Failure; S+F: the sum of results for the scales S and F; G: general; Gl: girls; B: boys

Source: Author's research.

Data from Table 2 allow to claim that gender has not turned out to be a factor determining the strength of the relationship between the researched variables. Almost identical correlation coefficients in girls and in boys were found between locus of control separately in success and failure and the generalised sense of control and the avoidance strategy of coping in a social conflict situation. Girls (0.21-0.26) and boys (0.32-0.40) obtained low Pearson's correlation coefficients r that are statistically relevant ($p<0.001$).

Overall, the analysis of the statistical results suggests that the locus of control (separately in Success (S) and Failure (F)), the generalised sense of control (S+F), and the avoidance coping strategy used in a situation of social conflict are not strongly correlated. In the light of the performed statistical verification, it can be concluded that the obtained results have confirmed the validity of hypothesis H.2.

Summary of the research results

The presented results of the research indicate that the level of general self-esteem plays a role in the choice of adopting an avoidance coping strategy in a social conflict situation. Adolescents are aware of their abilities and limitations influencing their way of functioning in a social conflict situation. It transpires that low self-esteem, and low appraisal of their abilities and effectiveness of action,

favours the appearance of avoiding forms of behaviour, reducing the emotional tension due to the conflicting nature of encountered difficulties (Campbell & Lavalley, 1993; Mazurkiewicz, 1996). As we can see, a negative attitude toward oneself, namely doubt in one's strength, favours withdrawal from interaction, avoiding relationships with others, not undertaking tasks, a lack of trust, and a hostile social attitude. Aversion towards other people, together with the inability to overcome social barriers, leads to numerous conflicts with the environment. A lack of faith in oneself, and abandoning actions as a consequence of experienced failures is an obstacle to coping with tensions. These elements comprising low self-esteem cause the inability to solve conflicts (Wosińska, 2004). On the other hand, low self-appraisal is connected with low activity, lack of involvement in problem solving, fear, and reluctance to be part of interpersonal contacts (Napora, 1999). Thus, low self-esteem is an indicator of withdrawal from activity and a lack of pursuit to achieve set goals in a difficult situation. An adolescent, adopting avoiding behaviour in a conflict situation, engages in replacement activities protecting their ego (escape from a problem) and/or looks for social contacts, without attempting to solve the conflict.

One feature of the 'me' structure is information about oneself and one's abilities to influence the course of events. Locus of control is a relevant variable modifying the behaviour of an adolescent in a social conflict situation. The conducted research indicated that in adolescents using avoidance strategy of coping with a social conflict situation, taking the form of engaging in replacement activities or looking for social contacts, there occurs 'a shift' of locus of control towards the external direction for the success and/or failure situations. Such a person does not believe that good and desirable events that they encounter are the results of their actions. These are rather attributed to some favourable combination of events or favourability of other people. Young people believe that the successes they achieve and the rewards they gain are the result of luck, blessing, or lucky coincidence. It may also create the conviction that positive outcomes do not come as a consequence of their actions, and becoming involved in activities is futile, because it does not have any impact on the final result. Furthermore, assigning the responsibility for one's successes to fate or luck may make young people lose motivation to control their own lives, and result in adopting passive behaviour in a conflict. The tendency to believe in a general, external source of control in adolescents using avoidance strategies in a social conflict situation is also evident when they experience failures. Such a person is unable to take on the responsibility for their failures, whose causes are seen in external factors being

beyond their control, e.g. bad fate or the viciousness of other people. The lack of a sense of responsibility for failures deprives such a person of motivation needed to attempt to change their fate, since 'whatever happens, happens.' However, not only. If a young person does not believe that effort pays off or might cause a change of situation, they passively wait for the consequences of a given situation; they behave passively while attempting to change the course of events. Instead, they accept their fate and engage in other activities, which serve as a distraction from the existing issue. (Borecka-Biernat, 2001; Dakowicz, 1996; Rostowska, 2001). These results indicate that the appraisal of a conflict situation as being beyond the young person's control is connected with the use of an avoidance coping strategy in a particular situation. The person's activity facing a conflict situation, being beyond personal control, is directed to escape the problem without attempting to solve it. As it turns out, the function of avoidance strategy is to escape from reality, from one's helplessness, lack of self-acceptation, and fear (Moos & Schafer, 1993).

Generalising the presented results, one may notice that young person's lower appraisal of their abilities, a strong belief in the influence of others on positive and/or negative consequences of events, co-occurs with a tendency to apply avoidance coping in a social conflict situation. The selected personality variables are not strong predictors determining the avoidant coping strategy applied by adolescents in situations of social conflict; this means that there must exist a relatively large number of other variables which might help to understand the avoidant coping strategy in situations of conflict in adolescents. The field worthy of further scientific exploration is the genetic (temperament-related) nature of the way an individual functions in conflict and the influence of the family environment on the capacity of the biological determinants, as well as its impact on the individual's ability to become a person who actively copes with conflict.

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