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**Relational Conflicts
at school and in the family**

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Forms of Social Conflicts in Schoolchildren as Perceived by the Children's Teachers

Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy konfliktów społecznych wśród uczniów szkół podstawowych w kontekście ich zaburzeń zachowania w szkole, z perspektywy ich nauczycieli. Przeprowadzono badanie wśród 92 uczniów, którzy zostali wskazani przez nauczycieli, jako uczniowie z zaburzeniami zachowania. Zastosowano Skalę Oceny Zachowań Dzieci dla Nauczycieli (metoda czeska). Rezultaty badania wskazują, że uczniowie z zaburzeniami w zachowaniu są przede wszystkim w konflikcie społecznym z kolegami z klasy. Konflikty obejmują negatywne relacje, w tym agresywne zachowania, trudnych uczniów wobec kolegów, w szczególności młodszych. Wspominane konflikty są związane z takimi cechami osobowymi jak: wyższa skłonność do kłamstwa, wyższa reaktywność emocjonalna oraz negatywny stosunek do własnego zachowania. Na podstawie wyników i wniosków z badań zostały opracowane zalecenia dla nauczycieli, którzy pracują z uczniami z zaburzeniami w zachowaniu. Zalecenia mogą zostać wykorzystane w doradztwie pedagogiczno-psychologicznym, dla zapobiegania konfliktom społecznym w szkole, w tym agresywnym zachowaniom wśród uczniów.

Słowa kluczowe

konflikty społeczne, zaburzenia w zachowaniu, cechy osobowe, reaktywność emocjonalna, doradztwo

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Abstract

Our article deals with social conflicts in “troubled” schoolchildren from the perspective of their teachers. Using Behaviour Assessment System for Children – Teacher Rating Scale (Czech method), a total of 92 schoolchildren have been tested. All the children were identified by their teachers as having behavioural difficulties. The children with behavioural difficulties have been found to engage especially in peer-related social conflicts, which involved negative relationships with classmates and aggressive behaviour, particularly in the younger children (1st to 5th grade of compulsory education). The relevant personality traits included a higher tendency to lie, higher levels of emotional reactivity, and a negative attitude towards one’s own behaviour. Based on the results, a recommendation is given to teachers working with children with behavioural difficulties, to aid prevention and render psychological counselling.

Keywords

social conflicts, behavioural difficulties, personality traits, emotional reactivity, psychological counselling

Introduction

In their classes, teachers encounter various types of behaviour. While some pupils are attentive, diligent and hardworking, others are performing less well. These children do not comply with the requirements of the educational environment and their behaviour is disruptive not only to teaching and learning, but also to the relationship between the teacher and the pupil. Problematic children keep disturbing the class and shouting out; they are inattentive and do not fulfil their duties, irritating the teacher and annoying their classmates. Often, they are unpopular in class, and are reprimanded and punished for their behaviour; and are seldom praised. The above is closely connected to the children’s poor school performance. Negative reactions of the teacher, the pupil’s parents and others in the child’s surroundings create a negative self-image in the child and contribute to poor self-evaluation. It is therefore essential that the child is given firm support in his/her learning process and the opportunity to fully develop his/her potential, despite all the difficulties that interaction with the problematic child may involve.

In recent years, the assessment of behavioural difficulties in Czech children has usually been performed using Behaviour Assessment System for Children – Teacher Rating Scale (Vágnerová, Klégrová, 2008). In her research, Vágnerová (2007, quoted in Vágnerová and Klégrová, 2008) employed a research sample consisting of 50 “younger” schoolchildren (1st to 5th grade of compulsory education) and 50 “older” schoolchildren (6th to 9th grade). The younger schoolchildren were found to exhibit various signs of immaturity (impulsiveness, restlessness, irritability). The author further claims that the pupils’ willingness to comply with the teacher’s instructions decreases with age, while the tendency to neglect homework increases. The younger children with behav-

avioural difficulties also showed a stronger tendency to assert themselves among their classmates, usually by “showing off”. The older schoolchildren were found to be more composed and less impulsive, showing a weaker tendency to react emotionally. On the other hand, they displayed a higher tendency to seek excitement and engage in risky activities. Their attitude to their own behaviour was found to be different and they were less willing to comply with school requirements than the younger children.

Other noteworthy findings were made by Vojtová (2009b), who in 2008–2009 conducted research focusing on 7th and 8th grade children with behavioural difficulties. The research was done through self-assessment of 1596 pupils, revealing that 5–20% of the respondents were aware of certain problematic aspects of their behaviour. Vojtová (2009b) further states that girls showed more self-confidence than boys, adding that because girls’ behaviour is probably less conspicuous than boys’, the teachers tend to view girls as less troubled.

In 2010, research focusing on integrating ADHD children into ordinary classes was conducted at three elementary (compulsory-education) schools in Prague. In addition to ADHD, some of the children were diagnosed with a particular SLD form. The objective of the research was to learn about the children’s relationships with their classmates and teachers, and to find out what impact ADHD and SLD has on teaching and learning. The research was conducted by means of questionnaires administered to 140 respondents, including 76 pupils in the 5th grade, 38 pupils in the 8th grade, and 26 teachers. The return rate of questionnaires from pupils was 100%, for teachers it was 70 %. The research results confirmed the hypothesis that low-performing children (including those with ADHD and SLD) find it more difficult to establish social relationships and they have a worse relative position among peers than children with average or exceptional performance. Therefore, a question arises as to whether it is ADHD or SLD that causes poor school performance and problematic relationships with peers. The above research further revealed that children with ADHD and SLD do not exhibit a negative influence on the classroom environment, although they do not tend to be popular in class or well-liked by their classmates (as assessed by a sociometric measure of peer acceptance). The research further showed high knowledge levels among the pupils (received from their class teachers) regarding the integration of disadvantaged children and high tolerance levels among the pupils of educational concessions for the disadvantaged children. The pupils were, however, less tolerant of the disadvantaged children’s disruptive and restless behaviour in class (Fryntová and Hubinková, 2011). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is closely linked to problematic and disruptive behaviour in class as well as to occurring behaviour disorders (e.g. Train, 2001; Vojtová, 2010).

In 2014, research was conducted addressing improper behaviour of school-aged children and the degree to which the children themselves excuse such behaviour. A total of 446

school-aged children attending 8th and 9th grades from six schools in the South-Bohemian Region participated in the research. Of the 446 questionnaires administered to the children, 438 were analysed. The survey employed two sets of questionnaires, with one related to copying and cheating frequency at school, and the other testing the degree to which a positive attitude to cheating vs. adherence to the moral norm of honesty was in evidence. “Cheating” included forging a parent’s signature, lying about absenteeism, and inventing health problems or difficult family situations in order to gain advantages over classmates. According to Vrbová (2014), acceptance of moral norms shows no direct correlation with copying or cheating frequency. Her research further revealed a tendency to neutralize cheating rather than copying. Copying a classmate’s work may not always be viewed as an immoral activity, and so the children do not feel the need to provide an excuse. Moral neutralization helps schoolchildren to cope with the conflict between how they “should behave” and how they “actually behave” (Vrbová, 2014). The results indicate that school-aged children with behavioural difficulties, particularly the older ones, have a relatively low ability (or lack thereof) to judge the adequacy of their own behaviour, consciously breaching social and school norms and rules (Vojtová, 2009a, 2010).

The objective of the research and hypotheses

Our **research objective** was to identify the most common types of behavioural difficulties in school-aged children from their teachers’ perspective. Our aim was to compare problematic behaviour in male and female children and to determine whether the behavioural difficulties are age-related and area-dependent (village vs city). In addition, we investigated the links between the various problematic behavioural categories.

The following **research hypotheses** were tested:

H1: *There is a statistically significant difference between male and female schoolchildren in the overall degree of behavioural difficulties.*

Boys have been expected to display more problematic behaviour than girls. In addition, we expected male children to outnumber female children in our research sample.

H2: *There is a statistically significant difference in the degree of behavioural difficulties between the younger (approx. 6–11 years) and the older (approx. 12–15 years) schoolchildren.*

The older schoolchildren were expected to exhibit more of problematic behaviour than the younger children.

H3: *There is a statistically significant relationship between overall behavioural difficulties and the children’s relationships with their classmates.*

We expected troubled children to experience disrupted relationships with their classmates.

H4: *There is a statistically significant relationship between a tendency to lie and the attitude to one's own behaviour.*

Schoolchildren with behavioural difficulties were expected to excuse their own dishonest behaviour and try to justify it, unable to show perspective in their behaviour in a given situation.

H5: *There is a statistically significant relationship between negative relationships with classmates and behavioural aggression.*

We expected the children with negative relationships with their classmates to exhibit an increased propensity for aggression.

Method

Using the Behaviour Assessment System for Children – Teacher Rating Scale (Vágnerová, Klégrová, 2008), the troubled children's teachers assessed the behaviour of their pupils. The scale comprises 42 items divided into seven categories (Vágnerová, Klégrová, 2008). Each sub-category contains six items; the degree of agreement with each item is indicated using a three-point scale (2, 1, 0). The numbers indicate either the frequency of a given behaviour or the degree to which the respondent agrees with a given statement (for instance: 2 – Often, 1 – Sometimes, 0 – Never; 2 – Yes, 1 – Sometimes, 0 – No; 2 – Often, 1 – Sometimes, 0 – Rarely). The higher the number of points for each category (and the total number of points), the higher the degree of behavioural difficulties. The highest number is 12 for each sub-category and 84 for the whole scale. The overall raw score and sub-scores were converted to sten scores. The scale has been preliminarily standardized and adjusted for use in the Czech educational environment.

The category entitled *Behaviour in Class* covers preparation for classes and the child's behaviour in class, including whether he/she is paying attention and following the teacher's instructions, or keeps disturbing or playing truant from school.

The category *Relationships with Classmates* concerns the peer popularity levels vs. proneness to conflict and showing off. It indicates the child's ability level to cooperate and empathize with peers.

The category *Attitude to Teacher* covers the child's ability to respect the authority of the teacher, to accept the teacher's requirements and to comply with them. In addition, the category marks the presence of defiant and provocative behaviour and repeated efforts to attract the teacher's attention as well as teacher-oriented negativism. The category also expresses the level of the teacher's difficulty in working with the child.

The category *Emotional Reactivity and Related Behaviours* (hereinafter referred to as *Emotional Reactivity*) concerns impulsiveness, quick-temperedness, irritability and peevishness vs. the child's composure and ability to self-control others.

The category *Tendency to Aggression* marks the presence of inconsiderateness, cruelty and violence in the child's behaviour towards classmates. The typical behaviours include demeaning others, taking pleasure in hurting others, and destructive behaviour directed at self, others and things (breaking things).

The category *Mendacity and Psychological Stylization* concerns the level of the child's truthfulness vs. denying facts, putting blame on classmates, inventing excuses for one's own misbehaviour or for not fulfilling his/her duties, and also fantasizing ("making up stories") in order to attract attention.

The category *Attitude to One's Own Behaviour* concerns adherence to common behavioural rules, the degree of remorsefulness as a reaction to a morally wrong behaviour and the ability to judge one's own behavioural adequacy in a particular situation. In addition, the category inquires about grievances against the others and awareness of proper, "correct" behaviour accompanied by the inability to translate it into action.

Research sample and procedure

Our research sample consisted of school-aged children with behavioural difficulties. The selection was done by the children's teachers at their own discretion. The selected pupils were then anonymously assessed using the above scale; the data are subjective. A total of nine schools participated in the research: four city schools and five village schools. Data collection was conducted throughout the year 2015.

The questionnaires were administered to the teachers in print form via school counsellors and headmasters who had familiarized themselves with the guidelines for filling in the questionnaires. Each teacher was asked to assess the behaviour of a child they consider "troubled", without providing either the child's name or their own. If a teacher had two or more troubled pupils in their classes, they were free to fill in several questionnaires. Since the children's selections were left to the teachers' discretion, it is likely that some children were assessed by two or more teachers; therefore, the completed questionnaires may not correspond to the number of assessed pupils.

Demographic variables collected about each child included sex, grade, stage of schooling (Czech compulsory, or "elementary", education comprises two stages, with the first stage covering the first five grades and the second stage covering the last four compulsory education grades; throughout the article, we will be using the terms "the younger/older schoolchildren", respectively). The total number of filled-in questionnaires was 92, with 90

% assessing male children (N = 83) and 10 % female children (N = 9). Concerning the questionnaires we received, 45 % (N = 41) assessed the younger schoolchildren (1st compulsory education stage), with 55 % (N = 51) assessing the older schoolchildren's behaviour (2nd compulsory education stage). Village schools accounted for 53 % of the total questionnaires (N = 49) and city schools for 47 % (N = 43).

Demographic variables collected about the teachers included sex, age and their teaching experience duration. Most teachers were female (N = 79), who accounted for 86 % of the total number. Due to the uneven distribution, the median and the interquartile range were used for age and teaching experience duration rather than the mean and standard deviation. The mean age of the teachers was 40 years (Me = 40; IQR = 18). For our research, the teachers were divided into four age groups: age 23 to 29 years (N = 22; 23.9 %); 30 to 39 years (N = 17; 18.5 %); 40 to 49 years (N = 38; 41.3 %); and 50 to 60 years (N = 15; 16.3 %). The average teaching experience duration was 15 years (Me = 15; IQR = 18), with most teachers having a teaching experience up to five years (N = 25; 27.2 %).

Results

The raw scores reflecting behavioural difficulties were converted to sten scores, with the pupil's problematic behavioural level being expressed by a number on the 1–10 sten scale. Table 1 lists average sten scores (N = 92) for the categories described above. The higher the scores for a particular category, the more salient (and problematic) the relevant traits are in the child's behaviour. The highest mean values were found for the following categories: *Relationships with Classmates* (m = 7.26; sd = 3.15); *Mendacity and Psychological Stylization* (m = 7.13; sd = 3.24); *Emotional Reactivity* (7.10; sd = 3.48); and *Attitude to One's Own Behaviour* (6.99; sd = 2.83).

Table 1. Mean Sten Scores for the Categories of Behavioural Difficulties (N = 92)

Category	Behaviour in Class	Relationships with Classmates	Attitude to Teacher	Emotional Reactivity	Tendency to Aggression	Mendacity and Psychological Stylization	Attitude to Own Behaviour
Mean	5.89	7.26	5.53	7.10	4.36	7.13	6.99

We were interested in the possible correlation of behavioural difficulties assessment with **the teacher's age, sex and of teaching experience duration**. A factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showed no statistically significant relationship between problematic behaviour and either the teacher's age (F = 0.34; df = 3, p = 0.80), teaching experience duration (F = 0.77; df = 6; p = 0.60) or their sex (F = 0.5; df = 1; p = 0.82). Therefore, the above variables were not considered in further analyses.

Assessed behavioural difficulties in male vs. female children

Boys comprised 90 % (N = 83), girls children 10 % (N = 9). The large gender disproportion in the research sample made it impossible to compare males and females with respect to behavioural difficulties; nor was it possible to compare results concerning subcategories or individual items. The low proportion of girls in the research sample may indicate the lower levels of behavioural difficulties in female schoolchildren in comparison to their male counterparts, possibly also reflecting lower levels of occurring behavioural difficulties in female schoolchildren. However, the reason may lie in that behavioural difficulties manifest themselves differently in girls than in boys where behavioural problems are more salient and disruptive. Nevertheless, the above explanations are mere conjectures; a true test of **Hypothesis 1**, which predicted higher behavioural difficulty levels in male schoolchildren in comparison with female schoolchildren, could not be performed.

Assessed behavioural difficulties in children attending village vs. city schools

A comparison between the degree of problematic behaviour in children attending city schools and in those attending village schools was carried out using a t-test for independent samples. The mean value for behavioural difficulties in city-school children was 4.21 (N = 43; sd = 2.75), while for village-school children it was 4.24 (N = 49; sd = 2.49). The difference between the mean values was not found to be statistically significant ($t = 0.07$; $df = 90$; $p > 0.05$). No statistically significant differences between children from city schools and those attending village schools have been established, either with respect to subcategories of behavioural difficulties or with respect to individual items.

Assessed behavioural difficulties in the younger vs. the older schoolchildren

A comparison between the degree of problematic behaviour in the younger schoolchildren (1st to 5th grade) and in the older schoolchildren (6th to 9th grade) was again carried out using a t-test for independent samples. The mean value for overall behavioural difficulties in the younger schoolchildren was 4.34 (N = 41; sd = 2.42), whereas for the older children it was 4.14 (N = 51; sd = 2.76). A t-test for independent samples revealed the differences to be statistically insignificant ($t = 0.34$; $df = 90$, $p > 0.05$).

Other t-tests were performed to test the differences between the younger and the older schoolchildren with respect to the subcategories of behavioural difficulties. Mean values for all the subcategories are listed in Table 2. The difference between the younger and older schoolchildren has been found to be statistically significant only with respect to the category entitled *Tendency to Aggression*, with the younger children achieving a mean of 5.24 (N = 41; sd = 3.37) and the older children 3.65 (N = 51; sd = 3.30). It follows from the results that the younger children exhibited significantly stronger ($t = 2.29$; $df = 90$, $p < 0.05$) tendencies to aggressive behaviour than older schoolchildren.

Table 2. Mean Values for the Categories of Behavioural Difficulties – Younger (N = 41) and Older (N = 51) Schoolchildren

Category	Behaviour in Class	Relationships with Classmates	Attitude to Teacher	Emotional Reactivity	Tendency to Aggression	Mendacity and Psychological Stylization	Attitude to Own Behaviour
Younger Schoolchildren	5.71	7.59	5.61	7.61	5.24	7.17	7.17
Older Schoolchildren	6.04	7.00	5.47	6.69	3.65	7.10	6.84

Within the subscale entitled *Tendency to Aggression*, a statistically significant difference has been found between the younger and older schoolchildren with respect to the following items: № 26 *He/she exhibits destructive behaviour; repeatedly breaks things*; № 27 *He/she uses violence to solve conflicts with classmates*; and № 29 *He/she acts cruelly and inconsiderately towards classmates* (see Table 3). The occurrence of the above traits, including violence, inconsiderateness and cruelty, was found to be higher in the younger schoolchildren than in the older ones. Destructive tendencies were present in 70.7 % of the younger schoolchildren with behavioural difficulties (N = 29) 47.1 % in the older (N = 24). Using violence as a means for solving conflicts was observed in 68.3 % of the younger (N = 28) and 45.1 % in the older schoolchildren (N = 23). Cruelty and inconsiderateness towards classmates was exhibited by 61 % in the younger (N = 25) and 31.4 % in the older schoolchildren.

Table 3. *Tendency to Aggression – Comparison of Younger and Older Schoolchildren (N = 92)*

Item	Chi-quadrat	Df	p
№ 26 He/she exhibits destructive behaviour; repeatedly breaks things.	5.22	1	p < 0.05
№ 27 He/she uses violence to solve conflicts with classmates.	4.95	1	p < 0.05
№ 29 He/she acts cruelly and inconsiderately towards classmates	8.06	1	p < 0.01

Further statistically significant differences were found with respect to three individual items falling under the following subscales: *Behaviour in Class*, *Relationships with Classmates* and *Emotional Reactivity*. When assessing their pupils' conduct in relation to item № 6 (*He/she skips classes*), the teachers marked "Sometimes" for only two younger children (4.9 %), while avoiding classes "Sometimes" or "Often" was true for

16 older children (31.4 %). The results appear to indicate that the older schoolchildren have more “experience” in skipping classes than their younger counterparts (chi-quadrade = 10.14; df = 1; $p < 0.01$). With respect to item № 8 (*He/she is confrontational*), the younger children were found to act more confrontationally towards their classmates (N = 34; 82.9 %) than the older children (N = 33; 64.7 %), (chi-quadrade = 3.81; df = 1; $p < 0.05$). The results for item № 19 (*He/she is calm and composed*) revealed irritability and lack of composure for most younger children (95 %, N = 39), whereas the same traits were observed only in 74.5 % of the older children (N = 38), (chi-quadrade = 7.08; df = 1; $p < 0.01$).

Table 4. Significance Levels of the Differences between Older and Younger Schoolchildren with Respect to Items 6, 8 and 19 of the Behaviour Assessment System for Children – Teacher Rating Scale (N = 92)

Item	Chi-quadrade	Df	p
№ 6 He/she skips classes.	10.14	1	$p < 0.01$
№ 8 He/she is confrontational.	3.81	1	$p < 0.05$
№ 19 He/she is calm and composed.	7.08	1	$p < 0.01$

Hypothesis 2, which predicted a statistically significant difference in the overall behavioural difficulties between younger and older schoolchildren, was not confirmed. A statistically significant difference was established only in relation to *Tendency to Aggression* ($t = 2.29$; df = 90, $p < 0.05$). The younger schoolchildren exhibited higher aggression levels than the older schoolchildren, showing more violence, cruelty and inconsiderateness towards their classmates, and stronger destructive tendencies.

Relationship between the Overall Degree of Behavioural Difficulties and the Subcategories

A correlation analysis was employed to test the relationship between overall behavioural difficulties and individual personality traits. Scatter variables plots showed a strong linear relationship, hence a positive correlation, between the above phenomena. The data was processed using Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient, which revealed the statistical significance for all the correlations to be at the level of $p < 0.01$.

Table 5. Correlation Between the Overall Degree of Behavioural Difficulties and the Subcategories (Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient r)

Cate- gory	Behaviour in Class	Relationships with Classmates	Attitude to Teacher	Emotional Reactivity	Tendency to Aggression	Mendacity and Psychological Stylization	Attitude to Own Behaviour
R	0.69**	0.84**	0.81**	0.83**	0.81**	0.66**	0.83**

** $p < 0.01$

The above confirmed **Hypothesis 3** predicting a statistically significant relationship between the overall degree of behavioural difficulties and the relationship quality with classmates (category *Relationship with Classmates*). Correlation between the variables has been found to be very strong ($r = 0.84$; $p < 0.01$) and positive, showing that troubled children experience negative relationships with classmates.

Relationships among the Behavioural Difficulties Subcategories

The relationships among the individual behavioural difficulties subcategories were tested using scatter plots and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. Scatter plots revealed positive linear correlations for most combinations (see Table 6). Using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, positive correlations between all the subcategories were tested for statistical significance and were found to be statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. Thus, **Hypothesis 4** has been confirmed, which predicted a statistically significant relationship between the tendency to lie and attitude to one's own behaviour. The relationship between *Mendacity and Psychological Stylization* and *Attitude to Own Behaviour* was found to be statistically significant ($r = 0.70$; $p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis 5, which states that there is a correlation between negative relationships with classmates and behavioural aggression degrees, has been confirmed. The correlation between the categories *Relationships with Classmates* and *Tendency to Aggression* has been found to be statistically significant ($r = 0.74$; $p < 0.01$).

Table 6. Relationship between the Subcategories of Behavioural Difficulties (Pearson's Correlation Coefficient r)

	Behaviour in Class	Relationships with Classmates	Attitude to Teacher	Emotional Reactivity	Tendency to Aggression	Mendacity and Psychological Stylization	Attitude to Own Behaviour
Behaviour in Class	–						
Relationships with Classmates	0.55**	–					
Attitude to Teacher	0.72**	0.71**	–				
Emotional Reactivity	0.53**	0.76**	0.70**	–			
Tendency to Aggression	0.38**	0.74**	0.54**	0.70**	–		
Mendacity and Psychological Stylization	0.57**	0.53**	0.50**	0.46**	0.49**	–	
Attitude to Own Behaviour	0.60**	0.75**	0.72**	0.70**	0.60**	0.70**	–

** $p < 0.01$

Difficulty in Working with Troubled Children

We were interested in teachers' perception of difficulty involved in working with troubled children. Item № 18 *Working with the child places extraordinary demands on the teacher* (Category *Attitude to Teacher*) included the following options: 2 – Yes, 1 – Sometimes and 0 – No. The results showed that nearly all teachers (88 %; N = 81) perceive working with troubled children as demanding, while only 11 teachers (12 %) did not view it as such.

Discussion

During their teaching career, most teachers will encounter the necessity to work with “troubled” children, whose behaviour in class is disruptive and complicates the teacher's work as well as peer relationships. In our research it was this latter category, namely relationships with classmates, that proved to be the most problematic category reflecting behavioural difficulties. The category *Relationships with Classmates* received the highest average sten scores (7.26). The relationship between overall behavioural difficulty degrees and negative relationships with classmates (category *Relationships with Classmates*) showed strong positive correlation ($r = 0.84$; $p < 0.01$), meaning that children with higher behavioural difficulty levels experience more negativity in their relationships with classmates. The above is in line with a research by Fryntová and Hubinková (2011) on school-aged children with ADHD. According to the authors, children diagnosed with ADHD find it difficult to establish relationships with peers; they are unpopular in class and tend to be sidelined. We consider these findings particularly valuable for psychological and educational practice as well as for special education practice. According to Kauffman (2001), difficulties in social relations constitute a main characteristic of behavioural difficulties. Therefore, we view it as essential to pay special attention to developing and cultivating quality interpersonal relationships and social skills training. Based on the findings by Vágnerová and Klégrová (2008), we expected an increased tendency to aggression in school-aged children who have negative relationships with classmates. The expectation was confirmed; our research revealed a statistically significant relationship between the categories *Relationships with Classmates* and *Tendency to Aggression* ($r = 0.74$; $p < 0.01$). In addition, we established a strong correlation between the tendency to lie (mendacity) and inadequate attitude to one's own behaviour (breaking rules, inability to judge one's own behavioural adequacy in a particular situation, lack of guilt, remorse or shame, expressing grievances). The above is in line with the findings that Vrbová (2014) describes in her research.

The large gender disproportion in our research sample prevented us from comparing male and female schoolchildren concerning their overall behavioural difficulties. The low

proportion of girls in our research sample might have been caused by several factors, one being the heavily subjective selection criteria. Another reason may lie in the differences between how boys and girls manifest behavioural difficulties in. In this way, our research is in agreement with the information provided by Bowen, Jenson and Clark (2004), who claim that behavioural difficulties in girls are less conspicuous than in boys; according to them, girls tend to internalize their problems (e.g. depression, anxiety and depression). Vojtová (2010) states that internalized disorders have a negative impact on the child's school performance and social relationships as well as on his/her perception of school events and educational situations. Internalized disorders are covert in nature and as such are often underestimated by the teacher. Another possible reason may concern gender differences in ADHD. According to Barkley (2006, as quoted in Kelly, 2009), boys are diagnosed with ADHD three times more often than girls and display behaviour typical of ADHD five to nine times more often. A further reason may lie in teachers' differing attitudes toward each gender. Vágnerová and Klégrová (2008) state that the troubled girls tend to be viewed less strictly than boys. This may lead to the incorrect conclusion that there are more boys with behavioural difficulties than girls. Further differences in gender assessment can be related to pro-social versus asocial behavioural occurrences possibly corresponding to internalized and externalized behavioural disorders. Pro-social behaviour is less "visible" and can be overlooked easily by the teacher. Disruptive behaviour tends to receive more attention (Vágnerová, Klégrová, 2008).

In addition, we set out to investigate the differences between the degree of problematic behaviour in younger schoolchildren (1st to 5th grades in compulsory education) and older schoolchildren (6th to 9th grades). The hypothesis that older schoolchildren exhibit more subjectively problematic behaviour than younger children was not confirmed. Vágnerová (2007, quoted in Vágnerová and Klégrová, 2008) points out the emotional difference between younger and older schoolchildren, with younger children being in general more restless, impulsive and quick-tempered, while older children tend to be calmer and more composed. Within the *Emotional Reactivity* category, the difference between the younger and the older schoolchildren was only confirmed with respect to the item inquiring about calm and composed behaviour. Our findings show that older schoolchildren tend to be calmer and more composed than the younger. Another significant difference between younger and older schoolchildren was found in relation to aggression levels (category entitled *Tendency to Aggression*). While Vágnerová (2005) states that aggression's frequency and intensity tend to increase in adolescence, our findings show the opposite, namely that it is the younger children who exhibit higher aggression levels, typically manifested in violence, cruelty and inconsiderateness towards classmates and in destructive tendencies (breaking things). No statistically significant

differences between younger and older schoolchildren were established with respect to impulsiveness, irritability, and the ability to comply with the teacher's instructions and fulfil his/her duties. Therefore, the findings by Vágnerová (2007, quoted in Vágnerová and Klégrová, 2008) were not confirmed. A statistically significant difference between younger and older children was found in relation to truancy. Our results indicate that the older schoolchildren exhibit a higher tendency to play truant from school than their younger counterparts, although two younger children with behavioural difficulties were known by their teachers to have a tendency to skip classes as well.

Our research limitations included especially the decidedly uneven gender distribution in our sample, which made it impossible to compare boys and girls with respect to their overall degree for manifesting behavioural difficulties; in order to enable comparison, the distribution would have to be improved. Our other problematic research aspects can be seen in the small number of teachers assessing the children and in their subjective selection of troubled children, who were assessed by a single teacher only.

Quite obviously, assessment quality is influenced by the contact frequency between the troubled children and their teachers. The great number of subjects taught in the second stage of compulsory education (6th to 9th grades) and the limited time allocated to these subjects prevents the teachers from gaining deep knowledge concerning their pupils. Teachers of younger children, on the other hand, may be biased by their previous experience with the child and by their more general view about problematic behaviour. As a result, they may tend to be more strict (or lenient) when assessing the troubled child's behaviour, or they can employ stereotypical notions. At the same time, the troubled child will likely be influenced by the teacher's personality, along with the child's liking (or its absence) for the subject. The validity of our findings could be increased by multiple assessments (by several teachers) concerning each child with behavioural difficulties. Some accidental multiple assessments of a single pupil cannot be excluded; however, our completely anonymous assessment (with respect to both the teacher and the assessed pupil) prevented us from identifying such cases.

We recommend "the Behaviour Assessment System for Children – Teacher Rating Scale" for use by school psychologists, counsellors and class teachers to assess problematic behaviour of school-aged children in various educational situations.

Conclusion

Our questionnaire survey consisting in teacher-performed assessments of behavioural difficulties in school-aged children revealed that behavioural difficulties are most prominently manifested in negative relationships with classmates, higher mendacity and

tendency to psychological stylization, higher emotional reactivity, and displaying an absent negative attitude to one's own behaviour.

Due to uneven gender distribution, no comparison could be made between girls and boys. The differences in behavioural difficulty levels between children attending village vs. city schools were not found to be statistically significant. However, a statistically significant difference was revealed between the younger and the older schoolchildren with respect to aggressive tendency levels, which were higher in the younger children (1st to 5th grades in Czech compulsory education). The younger children were found to show more violence, cruelty and inconsiderateness towards their classmates, and stronger destructive tendencies (breaking things). Strong correlations were established between the overall degree of behavioural difficulties and individual personality traits.

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Cognitive and emotional determinants for destructive coping strategies by junior high school students in a social conflict situation

Streszczenie

Celem badań była ocena znaczenia samooceny, poczucia umiejscowienia kontroli i emocji dla generowania u młodzieży gimnazjalnej destruktywnych strategii radzenia sobie w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego. W badaniach posłużono się autorskim kwestionariuszem do badania strategii radzenia sobie młodzieży w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego (KSMK), Skalą Samooceny (SES) M. Rosenberga, kwestionariuszem do Badania Poczucia Kontroli (KBPK) G. Krasowicz i A. Kurzyp-Wojnarskiej oraz Trójczynnikiem Inwentarzem Stanów i Cech Osobowości (TISCO) C. Spielbergera, K. Wrześniewskiego. Badania empiryczne przeprowadzono w szkołach gimnazjalnych we Wrocławiu i okolicznych miejscowościach. Objęły one 893 adolescentów (468 dziewczynek i 425 chłopców) w wieku 13–15 lat. W świetle przeprowadzonych badań stwierdzono, że niska ocena własnych możliwości przez młodego człowieka, silne przekonanie o wpływie innych na pozytywne lub negatywne skutki zdarzeń i reagowanie lękiem lub gniewem współwystępuje z destruktywnymi strategiami radzenia sobie młodzieży w sytuacji konfliktu społecznego.

Słowa kluczowe

młodzież, samoocena, poczucie umiejscowienia kontroli, reakcje emocjonalne, destruktywne strategie radzenia sobie, sytuacja konfliktu społecznego

Abstract

My research purpose was to evaluate the contribution of self-evaluation, the locus of control and emotions in generating destructive coping strategies by junior high school students in a social conflict situation. I used the proprietary questionnaire to test adolescents' coping strategies (KSMK), Self-evaluation Scale (SES) by M. Rosenberg, the Locus of Control Questionnaire (KBPK) by G. Krasowicz and A. Kurzyp-Wojnarska, and the Three-Factor Inventory of Personality States and Traits (TISCO) by C. Spielberger and K. Wrześniewski. Empirical studies were carried out in junior high schools in Wrocław and the surrounding area. They involved 893 adolescents (468 girls and 425 boys) aged 13–15. I stated in my research that low self-evaluation of a young man's abilities, a strong con-

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viction about the impact others have on positive or negative consequences of events and reacting with fear and anger co-exists with destructive adolescent coping strategies.

Keywords

adolescent, self-evaluation, locus of control, emotional reactions, destructive coping strategy, a social conflict situation

Introduction

Difficult situations are nothing special in human life. They accompany us from early childhood and thus knowledge about actions undertaken by an individual in order to cope in difficult situations and conditions is not to be taken indifferently.

Difficult situations do not constitute a uniform class, but an internally clearly diversified group. An important group of difficult situations is when, as stated by M. Tyszkowa (1977, p.211), “values and aspirations of an individual are subject to a threat or defeat by other people – by the mere fact of their presence, or as a result of special forms of their contradictory impact, or simply impact not compliant with the individual’s own aspirations (goals)”. A conflict situation with another person constitutes a fundamental difficult social situations in the life experienced by every human being. In interpersonal relationships a conflict presents an interaction between partners in which they become clearly aware of the differences in their interests, needs or endeavours or goals (Balawajder, 2010).

Adolescence is a period during which teenagers experience various, quite often contradictory, aspirations and they must cope with incoherent social expectations they are addressed with. Research reveals that a source of strong emotional negative overtones, as perceived by adolescents, are interpersonal conflicts including teacher conflicts, arguments with school mates and boyfriends/girlfriends, as well as quarrels with one or both parents and other family members (Kobus, Reyes, 2000; Jaworski, 2000; Mikołowska-Olejniczak, 2002). The most conflicting areas in the student-teacher relationship are school grades, tactless teacher behaviour, domineering pressure and inflexible requirements (Miłkowska, 2012). In turn, the main reasons for peer conflicts are provocations and mockery, groundless suspicions, slander, unfulfilled promises, treason, indiscretion, bad manners, popularity among the opposite sex, ruling in the class and sporting prestige (Różańska-Kowal, 2004; Mikołowska, 2012). Families with children growing up inevitably have to deal with conflict. Most problems with mutual understanding between parents and children are due to the adolescents’ changing attitude towards their parents. Young people are less open to their parents and, in turn, the parents often fail to cope with the increasing autonomy of their adolescent children, by trying to limit it (Ornstein, Cartrnsen, 1991).

Numerous conflicts with parents concern everyday situations – differences in tastes, opinions related to outfit, music, watching TV and/or using the computer, leisure activities or coming home late (Jaworski, 2000; Gurba, 2013). In the literature one can distinguish several main conflict-related areas between parents and an adolescent, such as parental control and the adolescent's need for freedom, parental responsibility and sharing it with their adolescent child, as well as parents attributing great significance to schooling versus the teenager devoting time to other activities (Obuchowska, 2010).

A conflict situation is related to problems pertaining to various behaviours defined as coping strategies in a specific social conflict situation, meant to restore the balance between requirements and adaptabilities and/or improve the emotional state (Wrześniewski, 1996). The ability to cope in a social conflict situation quite often becomes a destructive strategy (Heszen-Niejodek, 2000; Terelak, 2001; Borecka-Biernat, 2012). A destructive strategy is solely intended to reduce adverse emotional tension and/or put oneself in a good mood. This happens, starting from *withdrawal* from a social conflict situation, avoiding contact with it, refraining from thinking and experiencing this situation by neglecting and ignoring the problem, being involved in supplementary activities (thinking about pleasurable issues, dreaming, listening to music, sleeping, walking) and establishing contacts with other persons; through *compliance* toward goals execution that the partner imposes and which are detrimental to executing one's own goals, interests and desires; to *aggression* taking the form of an initiated physical act and/or verbal act addressed against specific persons, doing harm to their physical, psychic and social condition.

Numerous research studies and even informal observation show that adolescents have quite a substantial repertoire of strategies to cope with conflict situations that occur at school, in relationships with contemporaries or in their family home (Guszkowska, Gorący, Rychta-Siedlecka, 2001; Sikora, Pisula, 2002; Mikołowska-Olejniczak, 2002). From the coping strategies in conflicts with teachers and schoolmates most often mentioned by young people, one can distinguish aggressive behaviours towards others (buffeting, pushing, kicking, nicknames, mocking and taunts), attempts to derive attention from a difficult situation and deal with something different (reading, listening to music, watching TV), escape through keeping physical distance or isolating oneself (Kossewska, 1995; Mikołowska-Olejniczak, 2002). A. Hibner (2013) noticed that adolescent boys, when facing teacher's demands, choose resisting reactions more often: "claims" and "protest". One might say that these are behaviours controlling emotions.

A. Frączek (2003) conducted an interesting study on coping strategies in a peer group. Adolescent children aged 10, 11 and 15 living in Israel, Finland, Poland and Italy took part in the said research. Results of this research demonstrate that girls handle conflicts better than boys and they strive for agreement more often. An aggressive strategy

is more common among boys than girls. Aggression of boys and girls takes different forms. In the latter, it is more indirect, hidden, and used for defence. It is passive, adopting a form of telling on others, sulking, and emotional rejection. Boys use open, physical, more active and direct aggressive behaviour. This research shows that younger children more often use physical and instrumental aggression, while older ones – verbal and hostile aggression. Gender diversification in manifesting aggression is also evidenced in the research results by M. Guskowska (2004), N. Carda and others (2008), I. Pufal-Struzik, D. Czarnecka (2008) and D. White and others (2010), who stated domination of direct physical aggressiveness among boys, while girls revealed more indirect aggression towards their contemporaries. Behaviours typical for girls are, among others, verbal rejection, backbiting, slander, negative gestures and facial expressions, gossip, plotting and mockery (Dettinger, Hart, 2007). As similarly noticed by D. Niehoff (2001), boys show mostly physical aggression, while, in with girls, it's verbal, which suggests that the form of aggressive behaviours differentiates boys from girls.

Apart from the observed aggressive behaviours in conflicts, research studies conducted by D. Causey, E. Dubowa (1992) and J. Kossewska (1995) revealed that, with peers, adolescent children take advantage of coping strategies based on resignation, failing to commence actions, problem avoidance and distancing oneself. It should be mentioned that the research by A. Hibner (2013) demonstrated a higher level of “conciliation” and “submissiveness” reaction in adolescent boys.

Conflicts in child-parent relationships during adolescence constitute a common phenomenon (Kossewska, 1995; Jaworski, 2000). Adolescent children want to break free from their parents' guardianship and, by their behaviour, demand rights broader than ever before. The obstacles they come across and failures, as well as bans, orders and restrictions imposed by parents cause reactions of anger expressed in arrogant answers, ignoring orders, remaining silent or door slamming. It's worth noticing, as in Cz. Matuszewicz (1997), that misunderstandings and conflicts with mothers and fathers take place in approximately 55–56% of primary school pupils and secondary school students, whereas boys are more prone to conflicts than girls. In conflicts with parents, perceived as a threat to autonomy (restricting freedom, orders, bans) a teenager often shows considerable absoluteness, aggression, brutality, indifference, and even cynicism. In addition, studies by B. Lachowska (2010) reveal that adolescents in conflict with their parents perceive themselves as more aggressive and less compromising towards them, especially with the mother. Apart from aggressive reactions, coping with family problems in adolescents is also related to problem evasion and susceptibility to concessions, or looking for interpersonal contacts. In studies by A. Hibner (2013), significant intersexual differences among adolescents were disclosed, where boys' reaction to requirements specified by parents was, far more frequently,

conformist and reflected in “submissiveness” and “conciliation”. Meanwhile, considering parental pressure, resisting reactions were more often observed in girls, reacting by “counter-pressure”, “resentment” and “protest”.

Considerations so far give evidence that social conflict is related to coping strategy problems in a specific situational context, meant to restore balance between requirements and adaptabilities, evade and/or minimize tension, losses, adverse results. Research results and observations indicate individual diversity of reactions to difficulties and defence against extensive emotional tension among young people (Rostowska, 2001; Sikora, Pisula, 2008). One would have to ask Why do certain people, in difficult social situations, choose these specific destructive strategies, not others? According M. Tyszkowa (1986), psychologically in human behaviour, a special role is attributed to personality cognitive structures, which determine perceiving an external situation and emotionally depicting the situation, its significance and the course of one’s own actions undertaken by the entity.

The set of expressions and opinions about oneself, as well as expectations towards oneself, in other words, the “me” structure, plays a vital part in human behaviour in difficult situations (Tyszkowa, 1986). Information pertaining to oneself, traits constituting the knowledge about oneself, is a factor to evaluate one’s own abilities (Kulas, 1986). As far as we know, self-evaluation constitutes the “me” structure’s assessing and appraising. Its impact is demonstrated in how an individual functions in difficult situations. As it turns out, an unfavourable, insufficiently organised and irrelevant “me” structure, in a difficult situation is threatened and this, according to M. Tyszkowa (1977) causes shifting the activity goal towards defending the “me” of the individual. The result disorganizes the activity directed the goal. Research results obtained, inter alia, by M. Tyszkowa (1997), T. Rostowska (2001), N. Ogińska-Bulik (2001), and D. Borecka-Biernat (2006) signalled that the adverse role in a young man’s behaviour is played by low and high (inadequate) self-evaluations. In low self-evaluation we come across a tendency give up the goal, refraining from activities and withdrawing from social interaction. Apart from that, low self-evaluation, one’s own abilities and effectiveness of activities when facing difficult events, is conducive to aggressive behaviours. Whereas in high self-evaluation (inadequate) we observe mainly a tendency for impulsive aggressive reactions. As we can see, low and high (inadequate) self-evaluation decreases psychic resistance, decreases effective activity and hinders the individual’s adaptation to cope in a difficult situation. Even a small obstacle or insignificant threat may, in a person with low or high (inadequate) self-evaluation, trigger a tendency to give up, withdraw or demonstrate uncontrollable aggression. It’s worth adding that persons least susceptible to disorganization of behaviour in difficult situations were those showing high (adequate) self-evaluation levels.

An individual's subjective conviction concerning their control over the surrounding world are an important variable regulating coping in a difficult situation and influencing the undertaken remedial strategies. M. Tyszkowa (1978) pays attention to the control mechanisms which determine "what changes the human functioning is subject to in cases where they come across a difficult situation" (Reykowski, 1966, p.87). Studies conducted by M. Gacek (2000), N. Ogińska-Bulik (2001), T. Rostowska (2001), P. Kurtek (2005) and D. Borecka-Biernat (2006) demonstrated that the locus of control is the individual determining suitable coping strategies. Feeling in control, that is, the conviction it only depends on the individual's own activity (that something can be done to change it) is the basis for continuing efforts towards overcoming difficulties and intensify activity meant to find a way to overcome difficulties. Whereas assessing a situation to which a young man is not convinced he controls it is related to the destructive coping. Not believing about the possibility to influence life-related events makes it impossible to effectively cope with difficulties; it leads to resignation, withdrawal, giving up efforts meant to solve a problem, or it triggers aggression. It can be said that feeling externally controlled is conducive to applying destructive (aggression, fear, submissiveness) forms of coping with difficulties.

Humans react emotionally to a threat-related situation. Emotional reactions in a threat situation are related to human personality traits, as well as the way the human perceives the situation (Łosiak, 1995). In a difficult situation emotions are intense and are usually negative. Anger, or wrath, is one possible negative emotional reaction, which appears when one experiences stress perceived as a threat or a loss/harm (Wrześniewski, 1991; Lazarus, 2000). Persistent high intensity emotional excitation and along with having a negative character constitute 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 leading to aggressive behaviour are those in line with the sequence: irritation – exasperation – anger. Their intensity defines intensification and the form of aggression. The analyses by Z. Skorny (1987), S. Berkowitz (1992), W. Łosiak (2009) disclose that a young man's inclination to react with anger, that wrath correlates with commencing a fight, not giving up in difficult situations. The general result is that anger and exasperation trigger actions aimed at recovering threatened or lost aims and lead to aggressive behaviour.

Fear also constitutes one possible negative emotional reaction triggered by threat situations, objective or subjective, external or internal, present now or in the future (Doliński, 2000; Łosiak, 2008). It occurs when a human is put in a situation with which he cannot cope, has little control over it, or does not control it at all (1995). Fear is generally unpleasant and therefore the person seeks to get released from this emotion. Re-

search results by M. Eysenck (2001), E. Nitendel-Bujakowa (2001), D. Borecka-Biernat (2006), W. Łosiak (2009) clearly showed that emotions, in anxiety-fright-fear sequence, usually lead to escape. A young man, fighting against fear, takes advantage, more or less consciously, of coping with them, such as withdrawal from a fearful situation, “drowning” fear by constantly looking for various activities (sleep, eating, shopping), looking for other persons’ company, attempts at not thinking about the problem, escape into fantasies and dreams, buying items regarded as bringing luck, for example, charms, or reaching for stimulants and sedatives.

According to considerations taken into account so far, it seems that in natural conditions anger facilitates fighting, while fear facilitates running away. However, observations indicate that fear may be why individuals attack when they have nowhere to run; when they have no other options except for aggression or attack, fear can be the reason for attack. A commonly known statement is that fear constitutes the basis for aggressive behaviour. It is one of the most significant aggressive behaviours. Such opinion is, among others, expressed by A. Kępiński (1992) and J. Ranschburg (1993), according to whom aggression constitutes effectively coping with fear felt in difficult social situations. As it turns out, aggression helps relieve the fear-related tension or hide fear, too.

Undoubtedly fear depends on its intensity. Studies conducted by M. Leary, R. Kowalski (2001), and L. Clark, D. Watson (2002) evidenced that fear, when its intensity is high, makes it impossible to effectively overcome difficulties, blocks spontaneous activity, and decreases motivation for transgressive acts, thus causing the human to lose control over their own aggression, or withdrawal or evasion from a difficult situation, while low and moderate fear intensity more likely drives one to make an effort to solve the problem. In other words, fear of low intensity may stimulate human behaviour but its high intensity disorganises it, as it favours perceiving many situations as threatening, even if objectively they are not.

A few authors express the view that difficult situations perceived as a challenge may evoke positive emotional reactions in a human (Lazarus, 1991; Spielberger, Starr, 1994). It is popularly believed that curiosity is a positive emotion accompanying unexpected events. It stimulates exploratory behaviour that contributes to solving problems (Doliński, 2000; Spielberger, Reheiser, 2003; Łaguna, Bąk, 2007). Generally speaking, humans reacts emotionally to threat situations. They may feel anger, fear, sometimes even satisfaction from the possibility of overcoming a difficulty. This is where opinions by B. Fredrickson (2001) are worth referring to. She claims that negative emotions lead to restricting the field of view and to quickly selecting coping strategies related to direct attack and revealed in evasive and escape behaviours. Meanwhile positive emotions cognitively broaden the field of view and lead to taking advantageous strategies related to looking for solutions in difficult situations.

The problem and research hypothesis

I sought to answer the following research question: What set of personality variables is related to applying destructive strategies (aggression, evasion, submissiveness) by adolescents in a social conflict situation?

Such a formulated research question allows one to propose the following hypothesis: Adolescents with a low self-evaluation level, feeling externally controlled, and experiencing a high level of negative emotions more often apply destructive strategies (aggression, evasion, submissiveness) in a social conflict situation.

Own research methods, examined persons

The Self-evaluation Scale (SES) questionnaire by M. Rosenberg (following: Łaguna, Lachowicz-Tabaczek, Dzwonkowska, 2007) was used for the Locus of Control Test (KBPK) by G. Krasowicz and A. Kurzyp-Wojnarska (1990); I also used the Three-Factor Inventory of Personality States and Traits (TISCO) by C. Spielberger, K. Wrześniewski (1991), and my own questionnaire for examining adolescents coping in a social conflict situation (KSMK) (2012).

Measurement. The Self-evaluation Scale (SES) by M. Rosenberg makes it possible to measure the level of general (global) self-evaluation in adolescents, as well as in adults. SES consists of 10 diagnostic descriptive statements by means of which the examinees self-evaluate their “me”. Each examined person answers using a four-stage scale, from I definitely agree, to I definitely disagree. For each answer the examinee can be awarded 1 to 4 points. The final results vary from 10 to 40 points. High level in the Scale means a high general (global) self-evaluation level. The Polish version of the SES method is a reliable tool, with confirmed theoretical accuracy.

The Locus of Control Questionnaire (KBPK) is used for measuring the personality variable. It consists of 46 forced-choice questions; 36 are diagnostic positions and the remaining 10 are buffer questions. The diagnostic questions pertain to simple situations from a school teenager’s life and form two scales: successes (Success) and failures (Failure). The questions concerning positive events forms the successes (Success) scale, and those pertaining to failure-like events, form the failures (Failure) scale. The sum obtained from both scales forms the generalized feeling of locus control indicator (Success+Failure). According to G. Krasowicz and A. Kurzyp-Wojnarska (1990), authors of the Locus of Control Questionnaire (KBPK), it conforms to psychometric requirements.

The Three-Factor Personality States and Traits Inventory TISCO is a Polish version of the American Saint-Trait Personality Inventory (STPI) test developed by C. Spielberger and team. TISCO comprises 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) examines the same emotions treated as personality traits. Therefore, this test includes six subscales: fear as a state (Fear – state) and fear as a trait (Fear – trait), anger as a state (Anger – state) and anger as a trait (Anger – trait), curiosity as a state (Curiosity – state) and curiosity as a trait (Curiosity – trait). Each subscale includes 10 short simple statements referring to an individual's subjective feelings. Results concerning reliability and accuracy of TISCO are satisfying and close to the original STPI version.

The proprietary questionnaire KSMK is dedicated to examining the coping strategy in a social conflict situation adopted by adolescents. It includes descriptions of 33 difficult social conflicts. For each situation four behaviours are assigned to express coping – the first one refers to aggressive coping (Ag), the second evasive coping (E), the third submissive coping (S), and the fourth activity-based coping (Ac). Results are obtained separately for each scale through summing up marked behaviours in 33 situations belonging to a given scale. The scales include 33 items; therefore respondents might obtain from 0 to 33 points in each of them. The KSMK questionnaire is characterized by favourable psychometric parameters. Scale reliability quotients, determined by Cronbach's alpha (internal consistency) method, are from $\alpha=0.73$ (for "Aggression", "Submissiveness" and "Task" scales) to $\alpha=0.694$ ("Evasion" scale). Scale accuracy was verified in many ways, for instance, convergent validity was confirmed in relation to results evidenced in the A-R questionnaire by K. Ostrowska, the Children's Assertive Behaviour Scale – CABS by L. Michelson and R. Wood adapted by M. Oleś and the conflict resolution style questionnaire by T. Honess and others, in its adapted form by B. Lachowska. The standard ten scales was developed on the sample study of 1877 students, including 975 girls and 902 boys aged 13–15, from first, second and third grades of junior high schools from all sixteen provinces in Poland.

Sample survey of the individuals covered by the study. The respondent group included 414 girls and 397 boys aged 13–15. In general, 811 persons participated in the conducted research. The respondents were students of the first, second and third grades of gymnasium schools from Wroclaw and neighbouring localities. The research was conducted in groups and took place in schools.

Analysis of the research results

In order to determine which personality traits related to a social conflict and applying destructive strategy increases (aggression, evasion, submissiveness) in adolescents, a stepwise regression analysis was performed with the strategy of aggression, evasion, submissiveness as dependent variables and the following as independent variables: gen-

eral self-evaluation level Self-evaluation), the feeling of locus control for a successful situation (Success), the feeling of locus control for a failure situation (Failure), fear as an emotional state (Fear-state), fear as a personality trait (Fear-trait), anger as an emotional state (Anger-state), anger as a personality trait (Anger-trait), curiosity as an emotional state (Curiosity-state) and curiosity as a personality trait (Curiosity-trait). Analysis was performed on the results for the whole group and separate analyses were also performed for the groups divided according to sex. Results are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1. *The stepwise multiple regression for the result in the aggression (Ag) KSMK scale compared to the Self-evaluation Scale (SES), Locus of Control Questionnaire (KBPK) and TISCO inventory scale: results for the entire group (N=893, for girls [N=468] and boys [N=425]).*

People surveyed	Variable	Beta	B	St. deviation B	t	P level <
Total	Success	-0.20	-0.30	0.05	-5.53	0.000001
	Failure	-0.12	-0.17	0.05	-3.24	0.001
	Anger-state	0.14	0.10	0.02	4.14	0.00004
	Anger-trait	0.25	0.19	0.03	6.63	0.000001
	Fear-trait	-0.11	-0.10	0.03	-2.97	0.003
	Free ind.		6.59	1.00	6.57	0.000001
	Multiple correlation quotient: R=0.44 Multiple determination quotient: R ² =0.20 Equation significance: F(5,887)=43.43; p<0.00001 Standard deviation estimation: 4.18					
Girls	Success	-0.18	-0.27	0.07	-3.79	0.0002
	Failure	-0.17	-0.25	0.07	-3.44	0.0006
	Anger-state	0.21	0.15	0.04	3.75	0.0002
	Fear-state	-0.15	-0.21	0.07	-2.91	0.004
	Anger-trait	0.25	0.18	0.04	4.65	0.000004
	Fear-trait	-0.12	-0.11	0.05	-2.40	0.02
	Free ind.		10.92	1.71	6.37	0.000001
Multiple correlation quotient: R=0.48 Multiple determination quotient: R ² =0.23 Equation significance: F(6,461)=22.79; p<0.0001 Standard deviation estimation: 4.11						
Boys	Success	-0.24	-0.35	0.07	-5.21	0.000001
	Anger-state	0.14	0.09	0.04	2.68	0.008
	Anger-trait	0.21	0.16	0.04	4.10	0.00005
	Free ind.		4.42	1.25	3.53	0.0005
Multiple correlation quotient: R=0.42 Multiple determination quotient: R ² =0.18 Equation significance: F(3,421)=30.628; p<0.00001 Standard deviation estimation: 4.20						

The first analysis was based on the whole teenage group, regardless of their sex. As presented in Table 1, five variables had significant impact on adolescent aggression strategy: the feeling of locus of control in success situations, the feeling of locus of control in failure situations, anger as emotional state, anger as a personality trait and fear perceived

as a personality trait. They explained 20% of the results variability on the aggression strategy scale. Other variables proved to be irrelevant aggressive strategy determinants. Beta values indicate that the stronger the conviction about external feelings of control – separately for success and failure –, the higher the level of anger of situational character and the higher the level of acquired disposition to react with anger; and the lower the disposition for fear-like reactions, the higher the level for aggression coping strategies.

Separate analyses were conducted for groups by gender (compare: Table 1). The stepwise regression analysis evidenced that, from among nine independent variables introduced into the regression model, six had significant impact in explaining the aggression coping strategy applied by girls in a social **conflict** situation. Other variables considered in the study proved to be irrelevant determinants of the girls' aggressive coping strategies. From the calculations it results that vital determining roles for the aggression coping strategy applied by girls are the locus control in success situations, the feeling of locus control in a situation of failures, anger as an emotional state and anger as a personality trait, as well as fear as an emotional state and fear as a personality trait. The multiple determination quotient indicates that 23% variance of the dependent variable is explained by these variables. The regressive equation parameters, including their significance, prove, however, that the stronger the conviction is about externally feeling the locus of control – separately for success and failure situations – the higher the level of anger of situational character and higher the level of acquired disposition for reacting with anger, and, similarly, the lower the fear level of diversified genesis (state, trait) is, the higher the aggression coping strategy level is in a social conflict situation in girls.

It was also verified which set of personality variables affected the aggressive strategy level among boys. Three independent variables turned out significant in the regression equation: the locus of control in success situations, anger as an emotional state and anger as a personality trait. The multiple determination coefficient $R^2=0.18$ shows that 18% variance within the boys' aggression strategies scope can be explained by the impact of the adopted independent variables. Other variables considered in the study proved to be irrelevant determinants in the boys' group. Beta values indicate that the stronger the feeling about external control in success situations, the higher the level of anger, and the higher the level of acquired disposition to react with anger is, the higher the level is for boys' aggression coping strategies.

The multiple regression model for the evasive coping strategy in a social conflict situation, as the explained variable, is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *The stepwise multiple regression for the Evasion (E) KSMK scale compared to the Self-evaluation Scale (SES), Locus of Control Questionnaire (KBPK) and TISCO inventory scale: results for the entire group (N=893, for girls [N=468] and boys [N=425]).*

People surveyed	Variable	Beta	B	St. deviation B	t	P level <
Total	Success	-0.20	-0.23	0.04	-5.42	0.000001
	Failure	-0.11	-0.11	0.04	-2.85	0.004
	Anger-state	0.09	0.05	0.02	2.61	0.009
	Anger-trait	0.09	0.005	0.02	2.44	0.02
	Curiosity-trait	-0.11	-0.08	0.02	-3.31	0.001
	Free ind.		8.08	0.86	9.40	0.000001
Multiple correlation quotient: R=0.37						
Multiple determination quotient: R ² =0.14						
Equation significance: F(5,887)=28.53; p<0.0001						
Standard deviation estimation: 3.22						
Girls	Success	-0.23	-0.25	0.05	-5.19	0.000001
	Anger-state	0.15	0.08	0.02	3.25	0.001
	Free ind.		5.54	0.75	7.43	0.000001
Multiple correlation quotient: R=0.29						
Multiple determination quotient: R ² =0.09						
Equation significance: F(2,465)=21.65; p<0.00001						
Standard deviation estimation: 3.27						
Boys	Success	-0.22	-0.25	0.06	-4.23	0.00003
	Failure	-0.16	-0.17	0.06	-3.01	0.003
	Fear-state	0.14	0.16	0.05	3.09	0.002
	Anger-trait	0.12	0.07	0.03	2.46	0.02
	Curiosity-trait	-0.12	-0.09	0.03	-2.52	0.01
	Free ind.		6.35	1.61	3.95	0.00009
Multiple correlation quotient: R=0.45						
Multiple determination quotient: R ² =0.20						
Equation significance: F(5,419)=21.28; p<0.00001						
Standard deviation estimation: 3.17						

The determinants for the evasive strategy in which adolescents cope in a social conflict situation are: feeling the locus of control in successes, feeling the locus of control in failures, anger as an emotional state, anger as a relatively permanent personality trait, and curiosity expressed as a personality trait. Altogether the variables explain 14% of the variability in the KSMK questionnaire “E” scale. Other independent variables in the study proved to be irrelevant determinants. *Beta* values indicate that the stronger the feeling is about locus of external control – referring separately to positive and negative consequences of events –, the higher the situational anger level is, and the higher the level is to react with anger, as well as the lower the level is to react with curiosity, the more often adolescents take advantage of the evasive strategy when coping with a social conflict situation.

Will the same set of personality traits turn out significantly for girls and boys who, when coping with a social conflict situation, use the evasive strategy more often? This question is answered by yet another regression analysis, as presented in Table 2.

The results establish that the locus of control feeling in successes and anger as the current emotional state vitally impact strategy meant to evade a social conflict situation by girls. The variance is 9% ($R^2=0.09$). Other variables considered in the study proved to be irrelevant. *Beta* value indicates that the stronger the conviction about external control is – referring to positive events – and the stronger the anger level is, the more often girls use the evasion strategy in coping with a social conflict situation.

Meanwhile the regression equation parameters, including its significance, demonstrate that the results within the control locus in successes, the feeling of locus control in failures, fear understood as the current emotional state, anger understood as a relatively constant personality trait and curiosity understood as a personality trait, have a significant impact on the evasion strategy used by boys to cope in a social conflict situation (compare – Table 2). Pursuant to the obtained results one can conclude that the stronger the feeling about locus of external control is, referring separately to positive and negative consequences, the higher the level of anger experienced as an emotional state and the higher the acquired disposition level to react with anger; and the lower the level of acquired disposition to react with curiosity, the more often boys take advantage of the evasion strategy when coping with a social conflict situation. The multiple determination quotient is low ($R^2=0.20$), which means that only 20% variability within the evasion strategy can be explained pursuant to the aforesaid variables.

In further analyses the dependent variable was the submissive coping strategy in a social conflict situation. Multiple regression analysis for the entire examined group and groups divided with regard to sex, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The stepwise multiple regression for the Submissiveness (U1) KSMK scale compared to the Self-evaluation Scale (SES), Locus of Control Questionnaire (KBPK) and TISCO inventory scale: results for the entire group ($N=893$, for girls [$N=468$] and boys [$N=425$]).

People surveyed	Variable	Beta	B	St. deviation B	t	P level <
Total	Success	0.09	0.13	0.05	2.67	0.008
	Anger-state	-0.09	-0.06	0.03	-1.97	0.05
	Fear-state	0.13	0.17	0.05	3.20	0.001
	Anger-trait	-0.22	-0.16	0.03	-6.07	0.000001
	Free ind.		6.18	1.25	4.93	0.000001
Multiple correlation quotient: $R=0.28$						
Multiple determination quotient: $R^2=0.08$						
Equation significance: $F(4,888)=19.32$; $p<0.00001$						
Standard deviation estimation: 4.30						
Girls	Self-evaluation	-0,10	-0.09	0.04	-2.21	0.03
	Anger-state	-0.17	-0.12	0.04	-2.89	0.004
	Fear-state	0.14	0.18	0.07	2.52	0.01
	Anger-trait	-0.22	-0.16	0.03	-4.69	0.000004
	Free ind.		10.78	2.05	5.25	0.000001

People surveyed	Variable	Beta	B	St. deviation B	t	P level <
Multiple correlation quotient: R=0.32						
Multiple determination quotient: R ² =0.10						
Equation significance: F(4,463)=12.71; p<0.00001						
Standard deviation estimation: 4.22						
Boys	Success	0.14	0.21	0.07	2.92	0.004
	Anger-trait	-0.19	-0.14	0.04	-3.79	0.0002
	Curiosity-trait	-0.10	-0.10	0.05	-2.06	0.04
	Free ind.		10.55	1.57	6.70	0.000001
Multiple correlation quotient: R=0.28						
Multiple determination quotient: R ² =0.08						
Equation significance: F(3,421)=12.11; p<0.00001						
Standard deviation estimation: 4.32						

The results show that feeling the locus of control in successes, anger as emotional state and anger as a personality trait, as well as fear as a temporary emotional state, has a significant impact on the submissiveness strategy in adolescents in a social conflict situation. The explained variance for the submissiveness strategy is 8% (R²=0.08). Other variables considered in the study proved to be irrelevant submissiveness strategy determinants in the teenage group. *Beta* value indicates that the stronger the conviction is about external locus of control feeling in successes, and the lower the anger levels are and lower levels of acquired disposition to react with anger as well as higher levels of acquired disposition to react with fear, the higher the level of submissiveness strategy is when applied by adolescents in a social conflict situation.

The submissiveness strategy determinant as a way of coping in a social conflict situation in girls are: self-evaluation, anger as an emotional state and anger as a personality trait, as well as fear as an emotional state. Other features considered in the study proved to be irrelevant determinants. The multiple determination coefficient R²=0.10 shows that a 10% variance of the dependant variable “submissiveness strategy” in the girls group was explained by the adopted set of independent variables. *Beta* values show that the lower the level of general self-evaluation and the lower the anger level (state, trait) and the higher the fear level are, the more often girls apply the submissiveness strategy when coping in a social conflict situation.

The submissiveness strategy level in boys is significantly influenced by the locus of control feeling in successes, anger understood as a personality trait and curiosity understood as a personality trait. The explained variance for the submissiveness strategy is 8% (R²=0.08). Other independent variables in the study proved to be irrelevant. Pursuant to the obtained results, one can conclude that the stronger the convictions are about internal control referring to successes and the lower the level of acquired disposition to react with anger, as well as the lower the level of acquired disposition to react with

curiosity, the more often boys take advantage of the submissiveness strategy when coping with a social conflict situation.

The above statistical verifications justify, to some extent, the formulated hypothesis.

Summary of research results

The analyses reveal a correlation between feeling the locus of control and negative emotions with adolescents aggression coping strategies. Thus, conflict situations with others (e.g. mutual aversion, unfriendliness, blaming) appearing in a young person's socially organized activity, are the forms most often co-existing with external control feelings. Therefore it seems probable that lack of faith in obtaining the desired results, or lack of feeling responsible for failures is conducive to adolescents revealing aggression strategies in a social conflict situation. Since they are most often convinced about its being impossible to have an impact on changing a social conflict situation, they do not focus on the problem source, but on themselves, defending the endangered "me". This causes a defensive strategy to be adopted as an aggressive reaction and is further strengthened by its routine application in the situation. The result is identical with studies conducted by I. Pufal-Struzik (1997) and T. Rostowska (2001).

It's worth indicating that adolescents applying the aggression strategy in a social conflict situation anger levels emotional states and higher levels of acquired dispositions to react with anger. This means that the more intensified the adolescents' aggression strategy is, the higher will be the anger level of diversified origin (state, trait). A similar result was obtained by J. Kossewska (2008) and D. Domińska-Werbel (2014) in their studies. It's interesting that high fear levels of diversified origin (state, trait) did not determine the adolescents' aggressive coping strategy. Such a result seems to reflect the conclusion formulated by M. Tyszkowa (1986), that the individual's personality structure and its traits determine whether emotional tension triggered in a difficult situation will be interpreted as informative and compensating in relation to the activity's aim, or as a signal that the adolescent feels personally threatened.

Throughout my analysis I stated that a strong conviction about the impact others have on positive or negative consequences concerning one's activities and the higher the anger level as an emotional state experienced in relation to this situation and the higher the level of acquired disposition to anger-related reactions plus a lower diversified fear level (state, trait), the more often will adolescents apply the aggression strategy when coping in a social conflict situation.

The studies also strongly indicate "shifting" the locus of control, separately for successes and failures, in adolescents who use the evasion strategy, meaning they look for

social contacts or involvement in supplementary activities. They don't believe that the good and desired events they experience are really their contributions. They rather attribute them to a chain of events or a favour from other people. They are convinced the successes they make and prizes they are awarded result from happiness, luck, or favourable coincidences. They believe that positive events are independent from their activities, that involvement in an activity does not make more sense since the final effect does not depend on the activities. Shifting responsibility for one's successes and failures onto coincidence or luck may cause adolescents to be unwilling to manage their fate and therefore remain passive. One may, of course, expect they will be withdrawing from phenomena surrounding the reality. This tendency for feeling external control in adolescents applying the evasion strategy is also displayed in failure situations. Lacking responsibility for failures causes them to not show motivation for attempting to change their fate, because "what will be, will be". The conviction they have no impact on their activities' results causes adolescents to not be motivated to change their behaviours so as to actively interact to change the situation. But that's not the only thing. The disbelief that effort made in an activity is profitable and may bring a change causes them to passively await consequences in a given situation, or remain passive in attempts to change the course of events. In other words, the adolescents do not believe that the situation they find themselves in may be subject to any change, and thus they do not try to influence it. They try to come to terms with what fate brings and, most often, deal with other activities in order to divert attention from the existing problem. These results are compliant with data presented by M. Gacek (2000), I. Heszen-Niejodek (2004). It was also stated that a social conflict situation experienced by adolescents may add to more frequently experienced negative emotions and discomfort caused by difficulties in problem solving. Teenagers applying the evasion strategy display significantly higher temporary fear and anger state levels experienced in relation to the situation they face and a higher level of acquired disposition to react with anger. Thus, an assumption that negative emotions (fear, anger), when achieving a significant intensity level, decrease cognitive curiosity, impede spontaneous activity, decrease motivation to undertake transgressive acts, and trigger behaviours like "escape" (inhibition, withdrawal, evasion) from threat-related situations; these, on the contrary, add to reducing negative emotional excitation, at least for some time. Such an outlined tendency seems to be compliant with the results obtained by M. Leary, R. Kowalski (2001) and I. Heszen-Niejodek (2002).

My study results also reveal that the general self-evaluation level plays a vital part when selecting a coping strategy in a social conflict situation. Adolescents are aware of their abilities and constraints having an impact on their behaviour. It turned out that lowered self-evaluation in assessing one's abilities and effectiveness is conducive to pre-

sending submissive behavioural forms, reducing emotional tension because of conflicting difficulties. A young man behaves submissively in a conflict situation and restricts implementing his own desires, tolerates threats to his own interests, or refrains from defending his own rights and feelings. As one can see, lowered self-evaluation is conducive to submitting to others' initiative and compliance in a conflict situation. It should be noted that general self-evaluation plays a greater role in submissiveness strategies in girls than in boys. My results converge those obtained by M. Oleś (1998) and N. Ogińska-Bulik (2001).

By generalizing the results it can be stated that a young man's low self-evaluation, his strong conviction about the impact others have on positive or negative consequences of events, his "me" feeling threatened by fear and anger, co-exist with his tendency for destructively reacting to a conflict.

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Perceived unfairness in teacher-student conflict situations: students' point of view

Streszczenie

Postrzeganie niesprawiedliwości w klasie koreluje z motywacją i indywidualnymi osiągnięciami ucznia oraz z jego destruktywnym zachowaniem (rezystancją, oszustwem, agresją). Niniejsza praca rozpatruje doświadczenie niesprawiedliwości ucznia postrzegane w sytuacji konfliktu z nauczycielem. Studenci (n = 99) opisali jeden z konfliktów, jaki doświadczyli w trakcie studiów. Doświadczenia postrzeganej niesprawiedliwości, opisane w konfliktach (n = 78) zostały pogrupowane według typu niesprawiedliwości (dystrybucyjna, proceduralna, interakcyjna) i 22 typów nieuczciwego zachowania (Mikula et al., 1990). Badanie wykazało, że niesprawiedliwe ocenianie, manifestacja władzy i zarzuty ze strony nauczycieli były najważniejszymi czynnikami konfliktu z nimi. Ponadto interakcyjna niesprawiedliwość okazała się najbardziej rozkorzeniona w sytuacji konfliktu uczeń-nauczyciel.

Słowa kluczowe

sprawiedliwość dystrybucyjna, sprawiedliwość proceduralna, sprawiedliwość interakcyjna, konflikt uczeń-nauczyciel

Abstract

Student perceptions of injustice in the classroom can evoke destructive behavior, resistance, deception, aggression, and conflict escalation. Our study explores student experiences of unjust teacher behavior in educational settings. Students (N=99) were asked to remember a conflict they experienced during their studies. The conflict descriptions (N=78) were analysed and grouped according to the type of perceived injustice (distributive, procedural, interactional) and 22 issues of unfair behaviour (Mikula et al.,

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1990). Our study revealed that perceived unfair grading, power demonstrations, and accusation were the most important predictors of teacher-student conflicts. Moreover students reported they experienced interactional injustice more frequently than they experienced distributive or procedural injustice.

Keywords

fairness, distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, student-teacher conflict

Introduction

Educational settings are complex and faced with various challenges, and one such important issue deserving special attention is conflict. Conflict is an unavoidable part of human interaction; conflict parties at schools may be students, parents, and staff members. Conflicts among students and teachers also are a natural part of school life. They arise in the classroom, sport hall, lunchroom, library and any place where students and teachers gather, and can be managed and resolved in different ways. Constructively resolved conflict, when participants are satisfied with the process and the outcomes, may help to raise and address problems, deepen mutual understanding and improve and strengthen the relationship among the conflict parties. On the other hand, when conflicts are managed destructively, trying to win by forcing the other party to conceive or eliminate all conflicts from school life by suppressing or denying their existence, they may cause inappropriate behaviour or relationship break. One important aspect in perceived conflict destructiveness is unfairness and injustice.

(In)justice in educational settings has recently been more frequently examined. Fairness is set out to be a key issue in the school context (Donat et al., 2012). Positive justice cognitions positively predict student motivation and affective learning (Chory-Assad, 2002), and have a positive impact on achievement (Dalbert and Stoeber, 2006; Burns and DiPaola, 2013). Students who feel justly treated by their teachers are more likely to accept and adhere to school rules and norms (Gouveia-Pereira et al., 2003), giving higher teacher evaluations (Tata, 1999; Schmidt et al., 2003). Justice experience correlates strongly and positively to school climate and trust (Correia & Dalbert, 2007); it shapes the development of personal believe in a just world (BJW) (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006).

Contrariwise, conflicts concerning distributive, procedural and interpersonal justice at school may be important in causing distress at school (Correia & Dalbert, 2007). Research in Italian schools indicated that perceived teacher unfairness can significantly predict frequent headaches among early adolescents (Santinello, Vieno, & De Vogli, 2008). Student perceptions of an instructor's injustice are related with students reporting the likelihood of engaging in indirect interpersonal aggression and hostility toward their

instructors (Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a), also with the likelihood of resisting instructors' requests through revenge and deception (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b, Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005). Moreover, unjustly treated students are more likely to express bullying behavior (Donat et al., 2012).

Although the existing research is unambiguous in agreement on fairness as being important in the classroom, various studies indicate that felt injustice among school students is not rare (e.g. Israeshvili, 1997; Smith & Gorard, 2012). According to the National Agency for School Evaluation in Lithuania (2014), approximately 20 percent of students have experienced unfairness in school. In particular, they reported, their teachers were unfair in administering punishments and rewards. Since there is a scarcity of research about Lithuanian students' perceptions of unjust and unfair teachers, we have formulated the following research questions: what issues of injustice arise during teacher-student conflicts; what types of injustice do students perceive in various teacher-student conflict situations; and what kind of unjust events can be characterized as the most typical or noticeable in teacher-student conflicts? Studying student unfairness perceptions in different institutional practices and the extent to which students stress fairness might help to understand how they adjust to the demands in the surrounding world (Thorkildsen, 1989).

Theoretical and empirical background

Justice and Conflict. M. Deutsch (2014) stressed a few important aspects existing in relationship between justice and conflict: (a) perceived injustice can be seen as a frequent source of conflict, (b) if parties perceive conflict outcomes as unjust, the resolution is likely to be unstable and give rise to attempts to change situations and to escalate conflict, and (c) conflict may exist about what is „just“, and about which principle of justice should be applied or how a chosen principle should be implemented.

Morton Deutsch described six overlapping focuses of injustice (2014, p. 30): (1) *Distributive injustice* is concerned with the criteria that lead a party to feel they have received an unfair outcome. The equity principle asserts that participants should have benefits in proportion to their contribution; according to the equality principle all members of a group should share its benefits equally, regardless of their needs and individual inputs; the need principle directs that people who need more benefit should get more than those who need less. (2) *Procedural injustice* is concerned with unfair treatment in making and implementing decisions that determine outcome. (3) *The sense of injustice* centres on what factors determine whether an injustice is experienced as such. For people sense that a process is fair generally requires that they believe that it is not partial and stacked against them; that it is relevant to the conflict or complaint they have; that

it is managed credibly, in which they have some voice or otherwise participate; and that it has the capacity to deliver what they want (Mayer, 2012, p. 156). (4) *Retributive and reparative injustice* concerns responses to moral norms violations and to how to the moral community that has been violated may be repaired. (5) *Moral exclusion* is concerned with who is included in the moral community and who is thought to be entitled to fair outcomes and fair treatments. (6) *Cultural imperialism* occurs when a dominant group imposes its values, norms, and customs on subordinated groups so that those subordinated members find themselves defined by the dominant group, and feel pressure to conform to and internalize the dominant group's stereotypical images. All these themes can be identified in various teacher-student conflict situations.

One theoretical framework to understand an event as fair or unfair is fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). Fairness theory focuses on the mental processes by which individuals compare current circumstances to some other referential situation and hold other people accountable for events that have a negative impact on their own psychological or physical well-being. It stresses accountability judgments (attribution of another's control over outcomes) and counterfactual thinking (mental comparison of person's current state to possible alternatives) on fairness perceptions. According to fairness theory, accountability has three components: (a) harm or negative consequences; (b) discretionary action attributable to another person; and (c) violation of prevailing normative or ethical behavioural standards. These three accountability components are necessary for blame allocation and sense of unfairness. According to fairness theory, a student will perceive a situation as unfair if she or he gets an unsatisfactory grade and believes that the teacher acted unethically (this action violates some moral or ethical normative standard), and that grade was in the teacher's discretionary control. So, student perceived teacher unfairness can be seen as a source of conflict in this grading situation. In different educational situations the importance of negative outcomes for a student varies, and attributing responsibility to the teacher as well as in perceiving violated standards can lead to different understandings and different behavioural responses.

Recently, some authors point out that not only do legal justice and fairness refer to different ideas, but justice and fairness refer to related — but distinct — concepts. They state that “justice should be defined as adherence to rules of conduct, whereas fairness should be defined as individuals' moral evaluations of this conduct” (Goldman & Cropanzano, 2015). In such an understanding, classroom justice should refer to events in the classroom environment that are morally required and involve normative standards, whether rules of appropriate conduct are followed and obeyed. Fairness should refer to a subjective assessment or evaluation of these events and whether the events as implemented are morally praiseworthy. People usually equate fair processes with ones that reflect a clear set

of standards, that are transparent, and that are applied in an equitable manner. Adherence to rules of justice should promote fairness perceptions. According to such understanding, injustice and unfairness can be understood as distinct but related sources of conflict. In the conflict context, many researchers tend to treat as synonymous the terms “justice” and “fairness”, and these terms are often used interchangeably (Maiese, 2013). Students can frame justice issues in terms of fairness and invoke principles of justice and fairness to explain their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with teacher behaviour.

Prior studies on (in)justice in educational setting. One important issue is developmental differences in fairness perception. In a pioneer study, Thorkildsen (1989) identified five levels involving progressively differentiated conceptions of fairness in educational setting: 1) equality of rewards; 2) equality in completed schoolwork quantity; 3) learning equality; 4) equity learning as partially differentiated from learning equality; 5) equity learning. Students in upper grades favoured the ‘acceleration’ practice (which fits equity rules: each student progresses at his or her own rate, based on capability) more strongly than those in lower grades. But it was found that learners across age groups believed ‘peer-tutoring’ (after fast learners finish a given task, they help slow learners) and ‘enrichment’ (after fast learners finish their task, they enrich themselves through other activities) to be the most just; and the practice where ‘all move on, slow ones never finish’ (fast learners advance with no regard for slow ones) to be the least just.

The equality norm was found to be considered by students ranging in age from 14 to 19 as most just in Dalbert and colleagues’ study (2007). Researchers who investigated which grading system – criterion-referenced, norm-referenced or individual-referenced – school students considered to be just, reported that students evaluated criterion-referenced grading as the most just grading. The study provides empirical support for Thorkildsen’s notion (1989), revealing that from 10 years to about 18 years fairness means equal learning, and about 18 students favoured equity of learning. Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004b) explored the dynamic of fairness perception noting that students may evaluate their grading fairness by comparing them both 1) to the grades they expected to receive, or to the grades they felt they deserved, 2) and to the grades received by their peers. Comparative judgements about teacher behaviour were also highlighted by Gouveia-Pereira and colleagues (2003). The authors claimed that comparisons with peers in adolescence take on a more significant role than in adulthood.

When considering teachers’ concern for fairness it was displayed that „fairness depends on a teacher’s knowledge and ability“ (Tierney, 2014, p. 62). Qualitatively studying teacher fairness revealed different attitudes when along with equal treatment the differentiation for individual needs („what is the best for the student“, p. 61) and opportunities („where the student is, what the student is capable of doing, what they can real-

istically demand“, p. 62) is underlined as well. Thus the evidence is in line with Thorkildsen, who drew the importance of balance between equality and equity.

Dalbert and Stoeber (2006) described school as a sphere in which students encounter important distribution decisions. Distributive justice arises in connection with who gets what grades and who gets the teacher's attention (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004). According to Houston and Bettencourt (1999), fairness perceptions take evaluative feedback and recognition, opportunities for learning, access to information, distribution of workload, and the application of standards in the classroom. Horan et al. (2010) reported four categories in which students perceived that their instructors distributed unfairly: grades, opportunities to improve grades, instructor affect and punishments.

Procedural and interactional injustice are investigated in the educational setting as well. Chory-Assad (2007) identified three processes in the instructional context dealing with procedural justice. The first process includes ways assignments are graded, the second involves the instructor's methods for conducting class, and the third draws up policies for student behaviour. Fair methods in conducting class is expanded in Horan et al.'s study (2010) who developed a nine-category classification system concerning procedural injustice. Besides grading procedures it covers other issues such as makeup/late policies, scheduling/workload, information for exams, feedback, instructor error, not following through with promises, class procedures, and not enforcing policies. Houston and Bettencourt (1999) supported the notion that fairness deals with actions concerning the accuracy and clarity of information provided to students regarding the class and exams.

Researchers as well demonstrated that the opportunity to appeal a decision is seen as procedurally fair. In line with this evidence Schmidt with colleagues (2003) explored that allowing students to have a voice in classroom situations will increase their perceptions of their professor's fairness. The results suggest that the students viewed the voice condition as a process by which they could provide meaningful input that would actually be considered by the decision maker. According to Schmidt and colleagues' studies (2003), adequate justification leads to a higher perception of fairness than inadequate justification. It is interesting that students whose professor provided no justification rated the professor's fairness most highly. A no-justification procedure evokes a higher perception of fairness than when justification is included. Other important professorial actions in this category deal with mistakes and a professor's response to those mistakes. Mistakes are seen as procedurally unfair because the professors' actions have such a strong impact on grade outcomes (Houston and Bettencourt, 1999).

Interactional justice refers to the fairness and quality of interpersonal treatment that individuals receive when procedures are implemented. Some researchers include interactional fairness as procedural fairness type (e.g. Gouveia-Pereira et al., 2003), whereas

others consider it as a separate but related construct (e.g. Houston and Bettencourt, 1999). As Chory-Assad (2002) argued, interactional justice comprises two factors. Conveying information clearly and unambiguously is one, while interplaying with dignity and respect is the second. In the classroom, interactional justice deals with the extent to which students are communicated to respectfully and politely, and openly by their teachers. Evaluations of the instructor's interactional justice concerns whether the instructor considers students' opinions, listens to their concerns, and communicates in a non-condescending manner with them (Chory-Assad, Paulsel, 2004 a). Houston and Bettencourt (1999) have evidenced individual respect and impartiality to be important interactional fairness elements. Moreover, qualitative study results revealed that interactional fairness covers professorial conduct in interpersonal interactions, which are displayed by going beyond the call of duty to help students, and being interested in student learning. Results of Horan and colleagues' study revealed that interactional justice issues included insensitivity/rudeness, stating or implying stupidity, sexist/racist/prejudiced remarks, singling out students, accusing students of wrongdoing, and instructor affect.

As the above review reveals, distributive, procedural and interactional justice issues are complex constructs that may be represented by many different variables. One approach seeks to define descriptors and variable definitions, another investigates variables dealing with justice reasoning; still another examines fairness as a function of other variables. Our research examines fairness issues. It seeks to determine students' experiences of distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice.

Method

Participants

Participants were 99 students attending an optional course "Fundamentals of Conflict Studies" at Mykolas Romeris University. Participation in the study was voluntary, and students had time in class to complete the task. They were asked to remember a conflict they experienced during their studies. The conflict memories form included free space for describing the conflict and questions to collect the following information: who was involved in the conflict, when did it happen, what the conflict was about, what strategies were used to try to resolve the conflict, and how the conflict was solved. Students had the possibility to recollect any conflict they were involved in at an educational setting. Responses that did not provide a sufficient detail were eliminated. Ninety-nine descriptions of conflicts were collected; the student-teacher conflicts were under consideration (N=78; 79%) in the article. Remembered teacher-student conflicts were from primary school (N=3, 4%), institution of lower secondary education (N=17, 22%), insti-

tution of upper secondary education (N=17, 22%), and university (N=41, 53%). Most participants described recently occurring conflicts with university staff.

Procedure

Firstly, the conflict descriptions were analysed and grouped according to type of perceived injustice. The researchers classified conflict cases into three groups, according to the student's perceived injustice (distributive injustice, procedural injustice, interactional injustice). Secondly, remembered conflicts were classified according issues of unfair behaviour. Prototypical situations or events which elicit the sense of injustice were used for this analysis. The behaviour patterns occurring in conflict situations were classified according the classification system developed by Mikula, Petri and Tanzer (1990). Researchers defined 22 types of events-examples which had elicited a sense of injustice. All the issues describe the context within which injustice feelings arise: 1) Breaking agreements; 2) Disregarding others' feelings, needs and desires; 3) Taking advantage of other; not doing one's share; 4) Betraying confidences; 5) Talking behind somebody's back; 6) Lying; 7) Making fun of another person; 8) Reproach, accusation; 9) Putting one's interests first; 10) Meddling; leading a person on a string; 11) Punishment; 12) Cheating; 13) Stealing; 14) Unfriendly or impolite treatment; 15) Abusive or aggressive treatment; 16) Not admitting one's errors; 17) Arbitrariness and bureaucratic treatment by institutions, office holders, or authorities; 18) Examinations, grading; 19) Failure to recognize performance or effort; 20) Goods and benefits distribution; 21) Unbalanced judgemental behaviour; 22) Demonstrating power and superiority.

We two researchers (the first and the second author) first classified types and the events independently from each other. Where there was a difference between the researchers' interpretation of data, consensus was reached though discussion.

Results

Results indicate that students reported they experienced interactional injustice more frequently than they experienced distributive or procedural injustice. In addition, students reported both conflicts covered behaviour that violated a single type of justice, and conflicts covered behaviour that violated two or even three types of justice. Frequencies for injustice types are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequencies for types of justices violated in teacher-student conflict situations

Type of justice	Proc. (N)	Examples of descriptions
Distributive	15 (12)	The tasks of colloquium were different for the two groups. The second group received a more difficult task and had to analyse more complicated situations. My grade was low. The results for all groups were very disappointing (code 97).
Procedural	13 (10)	The teacher scolded me for being late to a lesson. I explained that the bus was late. She angrily shouted that I needed to get up early. Finally, the teacher allowed us to sit (code 3).
Interactional	23 (18)	I performed the task. But in the teacher's opinion, I did not understand the task properly. The teacher began to insult me. I asked her to clarify the task criteria. She ignored the request and did not explain the task (code 18)
Distributive + procedural	12 (9)	I received a very low grade for my homework. Other students did not receive such a low grade. The teacher threatened me and said that next time I would receive a low grade because of such homework (code 94).
Distributive + interactional	16 (12)	I asked the teacher to explain the issue once again as it was too difficult to understand. I did not receive the requested aid but only a reply with a promise that I would certainly fail the exam (code 32).
Procedural + interactional	14 (11)	Each lecture began with a checklist of questions from the earlier material. In my opinion it was the wrong start. It was very stressful for me. I said it. But the Professor did not listen to my opinion, just ignoring it (code 34).
Distributive + procedural + interactional	8 (6)	There was an examination. Sixty students wrote case analyses. The teacher came up to me and told me that for me the exam was over, and I would have to leave the room. The teacher said that my behaviour was not appropriate, because I was talking. I tried to explain that somebody else was talking, not me. The teacher did not listen, and made me leave the room (code 55).
Total	100 (78)	

Overall the interactional justice category was reported most frequently. There were 46 conflict situations (60%). In line with the study by Mikula et al. (1990), a considerable part of the unjust events did not concern distributional or procedural issues in the narrow sense but referred to the manner in which students were treated in interpersonal interactions. The researchers explained this tendency by concluding that interpersonal treatment is a subject of justice judgments in all kinds of relationships, while distributive and procedural matters are more typically justice judgments in (formal as well as informal) social relationships with unequal power. Our study questions this conclusion indicating that for students fair relations with teachers seem to be the most salient and important.

Figure 1. Frequencies of unfair teacher behaviors.

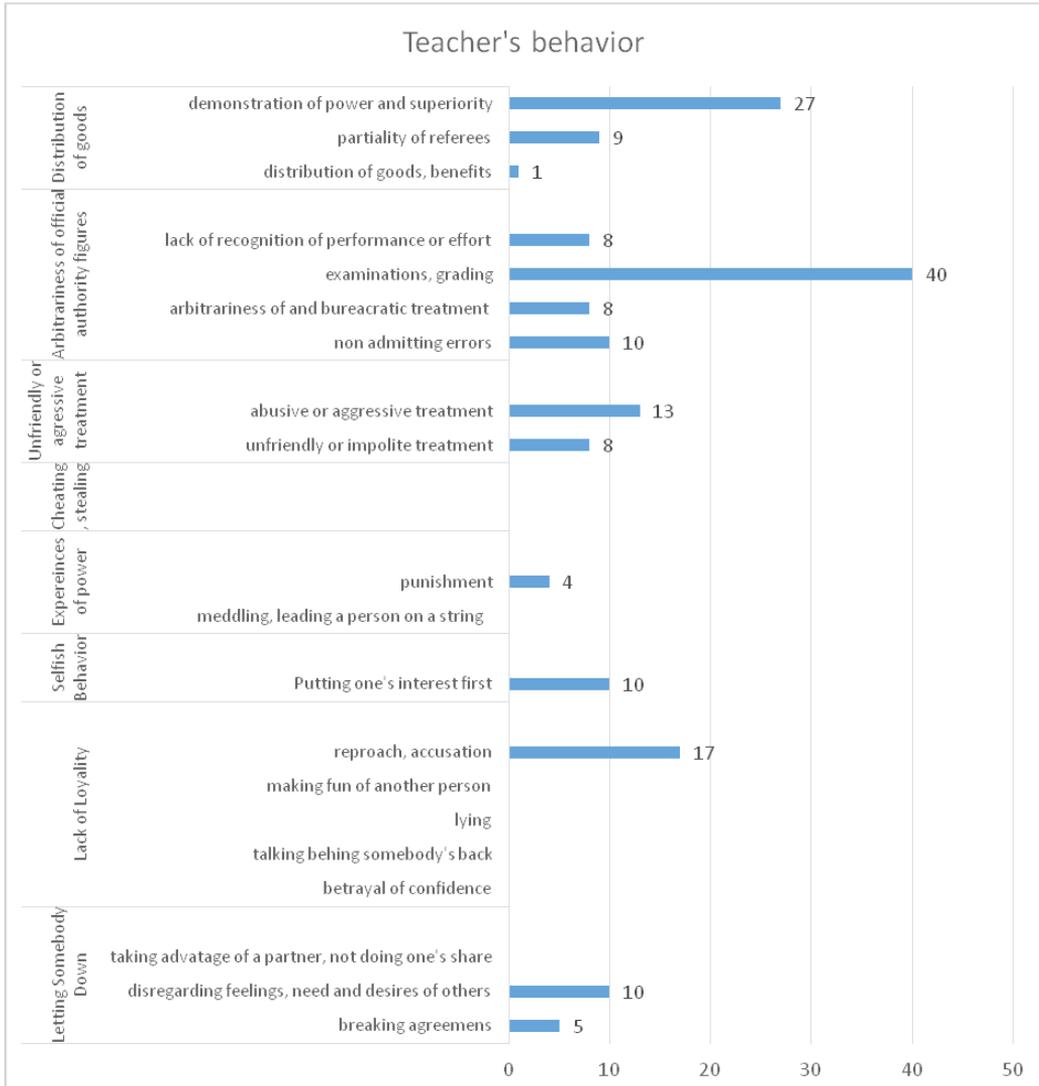


Figure 1 contains frequencies of certain unfair teacher behaviours. The most frequently reported unfair behaviour was in *examination, grading* situations (40% of teacher-student conflict cases). Teacher-student conflicts in grading situations, when students feel that they are the victims of unfair grading seem to be one of the most typical events in students' conflict memories. In line with prior studies (e.g. Israelashvili, 1997) the investigation indicates that improving the grade system may have meaningful positive implication on teacher-student conflict prevention. Findings in Sweden's schools indicated that when teachers failed to follow current grading system guidelines, used undependable information, allowed themselves to be influenced by personal notions and ex-

pectations, showed partiality in disagreement, or were ambiguous in their communication, students perceived the grading process as unfair (Alm & Colnerud, 2015).

Behavioural reaction labelled as '*demonstration of power and superiority*' was reported less frequently than grading. This action was mentioned in almost one fourth of reported conflicts. School was described by Resh and Sabbagh (2014) as one of the first institutions with which children begin to understand institutional authorities. On the other hand, unfair treatment, in particular, demonstrating power, may result in a losing legitimate authority (Santinello et al., 2011). Moreover, researchers have warned that inequality in power relations between teachers and students can cause inequality in power relations between students. The relationship between teacher unfairness and bullying can be described as a chain reaction moving downward in the hierarchy of power in class settings. It is also evidenced in prior studies that within asymmetric student-teacher relationships anger, helplessness, frustration, and dissatisfaction become more pronounced and stable (Umlauf & Dalbert, 2010, cited in Peter et al., 2013).

The teacher's unfair '*accusation*' was identified in almost a fifth of cases (17%). Almost every tenth teacher-student conflict referred to the teacher's actions, which were perceived by students as unjust or unfair whenever the teacher disregarded a student's feelings, needs, and desires, put his/her interest first, was unfriendly or aggressive toward the student, did not admit to student errors, was partial, lacked recognizing a student's performance or efforts, or treated a student arbitrarily. The findings are in line with those of prior studies. The most frequently experienced unjust events in Mikula et al.'s study (a sample comprising 280 students from Austria, Bulgaria, Finland and West Germany) were 'reproach, accusation' (12.1%), and 'putting one's interests first' (12.1%). With a sample comprising 233 students from 1st grade, 7th grade, and 9th grade from various school throughout Israel, Israelashvili (1997) reported 'experiences of parental power,' 'arbitrariness of official authority figures,' and 'distributions of goods and benefits' to be the most nominated unjust types.

It is worthwhile to note, that there were seven of 22 actions not cited in students' descriptions of teacher-student conflicts such as cheating, stealing, meddling, lying, talking behind somebody's back, betraying confidences, and taking advantage of a student. They as well were not underlined in Horal et al.'s study (2010). Similar to Horan and colleagues' study (2010) most indicated in this study teacher behaviours were related to how instructors graded classroom work/assignments.

Mikula et al. (1990: 140) suggested clustering the 22 categories into eight general types of unjust events. The clusters labelled as 'letting somebody down' contains 'breaking agreements' and 'disregarding others' feelings, needs and desires, and 'taking advantage of a partner; not doing one's share'. The cluster concerning 'lack of loyalty' includes vari-

ous insincerity forms ('betraying confidences', 'talking behind somebody's back', 'lying') and lacking acceptance ('poking fun at another person', 'reproaching, accusing'). The other cluster includes selfish behaviour. One more cluster relates to events where adults exercised or tried to exercise influence and power. This cluster is made up from 'meddling, leading a person on a string', or 'punishment'. One more cluster combines cheating and stealing. The next cluster includes all events relating to unfriendly, impolite and aggressive treatment of people. The cluster 'arbitrariness of office-holders and official authority figures' relates mainly to procedural and partly also to distributional issues, and combines 'arbitrariness of superiors', 'arbitrariness and bureaucratic treatment by authorities' and 'unfair examinations and grading' or 'failure to recognize performance or effort'. Finally, 'goods and benefits distributions, focusing more strongly on the social comparative feature than on events just mentioned, constituted an independent cluster. The eight-cluster solution depicts a meaningful grouping of lower level clusters and provides hints as to the main injustice types that occur in differing encounters and relationships. Each type's frequency in the present data is also presented in Figure 1. Data reveal that 'arbitrariness of official authority figures,' and 'goods and benefits distributions of' are the most nominated unjust event types in the 78 Lithuanian student-sample.

Discussion

The present study inquired into justice-related perceptions in educational settings by examining conflict issues. It was based upon the assertion that students describing their conflicts with teachers might provide an additional key to understanding how justice functions in the classroom. Our study investigated what issues arise during teacher-student conflicts; what types of injustice do students perceive in various teacher-student conflicts; what unjust events can be characterized as most typical or noticeable in teacher-student conflicts.

While discussing the findings, limitations need to be reported. The first limitation concerns the sample. It is small and very homogeneous in terms of age and educational background. Future research is needed to examine how generalized our study results can become. The second limitation relates to the research tool. Respondents were asked to describe the conflict situation, and in many cases they did not specify enough details to explain exactly how they felt and how they accepted injustice in their situations. Other study results show that there is an association between (in)justice and emotion. For example, attributing blame mediated the relationship between fairness perceptions and outward-focused negative emotions (e.g., anger and hostility), and outward-focused emotion mediated the relationship between fairness perceptions and retaliation (Barclay et al., 2005).

Our investigation provides information on main types and clusters unjust teacher-student conflicts based on of Mikula et al.'s conception (1990). Among the various teacher misbehaviours reported in students' narratives were actions interpreted as unjust: arbitrariness, unfair goods distribution, unfriendly or aggressive treatment, no loyalty, and letting students down. Our study indicated that students often perceived teachers' behaviour as a source of student-teacher conflicts. Students reported that perceived teacher unfairness was the cause for their behavioural response and conflict escalation. Our study supported the theoretical assumption that justice affects conflict behaviour. This study revealed that perceived unfair grading, demonstrations of power, and accusation were the most important predictors of teacher-student conflicts.

Moreover conflicts are argued to be related to more than one classroom (in)justice type. Conflicts arguably become complex experience complains of distributive, and/or procedural, and/or interactional justice issues. Although teacher-student conflicts demonstrate unique variance in all three classroom justice types, they contributed most to explaining the variance in perceived interactional justice.

The research highlighted the conflict resolution skills both for teachers and students to be critical for teacher-students justice conflict outcomes, which as prior research indicated affect students' school careers (e.g., Chory-Assad, 2002). Teacher conflict behaviour may be especially hurtful for students and experienced to be unjust as well. According to Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004 a) students respond to teachers' unfair treatment with behaviour that inflicts a similar amount of harm on teachers as the students have experienced. In classroom practice, our findings suggest that in order to avoid destructive conflicts teachers should be alert to students' understanding of justice.

Investigating teacher behaviour affecting student outcomes is important in preparing and training teachers. If teachers want to act in a just manner, they must know which behaviour is experienced as just and as unjust by their students. This can be achieved (a) by considering the knowledge of the educational-psychological justice research for teacher training and self-improvement, (b) by applying this knowledge in the lessons and create, for example, an open-discussion climate which enables the students to express their opinions and feelings, and (c) by complementing their own perspective with the perspective of their students (Peter et al., 2013, p. 1232). A general conclusion that may be drawn from the above study is that according to students' viewpoints, teachers may promote justice perceptions in classes by being less arbitrary, equitable in assessing individual and group results, showing impartiality in interacting with students, and being more skilled in class conflict management.

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Interparental conflict and child adjustment: main concepts and research findings

Streszczenie

W artykule zaprezentowano przegląd literatury na temat podstawowych modeli teoretycznych oraz wyników badań dotyczących wyjaśniania związków pomiędzy konfliktem małżeńskim a reakcjami dzieci. Głównym celem było zrozumienie mechanizmów łączących konflikty małżeńskie z problemami przystosowania dzieci. Przedstawiono dwa główne modele teoretyczne, tj. *Cognitive-Contextual Framework* (Grych i Fincham, 1990) oraz *Emotional Security Hypothesis* (Davies i Cummings, 1994). Analiza wyników badań empirycznych wskazuje, że konflikty małżeńskie wiążą się z licznymi problemami w przystosowaniu dzieci. Destruktywne konflikty rodzicielskie wiążą się z problemami w zachowaniu, podczas gdy pozytywna emocjonalność i konstruktywne sposoby rozwiązywania konfliktów powodują reakcje neutralne lub pozytywne u dzieci. Zaprezentowano również podstawowe wyniki badań nad skutecznością psychoedukacyjnych programów dla rodziców mających na celu prewencję negatywnych skutków konfliktów małżeńskich.

Słowa kluczowe

konflikt rodzicielski, przystosowanie dziecka, programy edukacyjne dla rodziców

Abstract

This is a review study of theoretical frameworks and research findings concerning the relationship between marital conflict and children's response. The main focus is on understanding the mechanisms connecting marital conflict to child adjustment. Two main theoretical models are discussed, namely, Cognitive-Contextual Framework by Grych and Fincham (1990) and Emotional Security Hypothesis by Davies and Cummings (1994). The analysis shows that marital conflicts are associated with a wide range of children's adjustment problems. Parental destructive conflict patterns are associated with children's behavioral problems, whereas positive emotionality and constructive conflict resolution lead to children's positive or even neutral reactions to marital problems. Results are presented on how useful psychoeducational programs are for parents that prevent negative marital conflict effects on children.

Keywords

interparental conflict, child's adjustment, educational programs for parents

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Introduction

In marital and family life interparental conflicts occur naturally, but intense, frequent and not well-managed marital disputes or, what is worse, unresolved marital conflicts are often very stressful for children. Children's adjustment problems as consequences of interparental conflicts may be manifested as: internalizing symptoms (e.g. anxiety, depression, withdrawal, low self-esteem, somatic complaints – Masten et al., 2005; Ackok & Demo, 1999), externalizing problems (e.g. aggression, delinquency, bullies other children, hyperactivity, delinquency, substance abuse – Masten et al., 2005; Ackok & Demo, 1999), insufficient social competences, and difficulties in academic achievements (Harold, Shelton, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2004). The links between parental marital conflicts and children's behavioral problems or adjustment difficulties were the subject of extensive research during the last 20 years (e.g. Cummings & Davies, 1994; Fosco & Grych, 2007; Grych & Fincham, 1990; Grych, Fincham, Jouriles & McDonald, 2000; Ablow, Measelle, Cowan & Cowan, 2009). From the children's perspective it is essential to know (a) which parental fights are risky for children and which are not, (b) which elements of conflict are the most damaging, and (c) is parental fighting more disturbing for boys or for girls? (Cummings & Davies, 1994).

The answers to these questions were motivated by the supposition that children might be influenced by different aspects of marital conflicts, e.g. frequency, anger expression, intensity, escalation, thematic content and ways of resolution. Initially, simple correlational studies on parental conflicts and their effects on children were performed on clinic samples, followed by analyses of variables that could properly characterize these relationships, namely, by playing a mediator or moderator role in relationships between interparental conflict and children's adjustment.

Cummings, Schermerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey and Cummings (2006) distinguished two generations of research on interparental conflicts versus children's adjustment problems. In the first generation, the relations between interparental discord and children's adjustment problems have been established (cf. Cummings & Davies, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 1990). In the second research generation the mechanisms or processes have been identified, which explain the effects on children who are exposed to interparental discord (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Grych, Fincham, Jouriles & McDonald, 2000; Harold, Shelton, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2004; Gerard, Buehler, Franck & Anderson, 2005). Also, an understanding of how and why interparental conflict is associated with child vulnerability to psychological problems has been gained (Fincham, 1994; Sturge-Apple, Cummings & Davies, 2006).

The primary objective of my study is to provide a current research overview on the influence that interparental conflicts have on children's reactions. The second objective is to present a concise discussion on the conceptual framework underlying a number

of research projects. The third objective is to put forward some basic assumptions for parents' education programs to prevent negative marital conflicts along with an effectiveness assessment concerning such programs.

This paper is intended as a selective review of research findings. Consequently, the studies reviewed illustrate rather than summarize the relevant research results and point out some practical implications for educators.

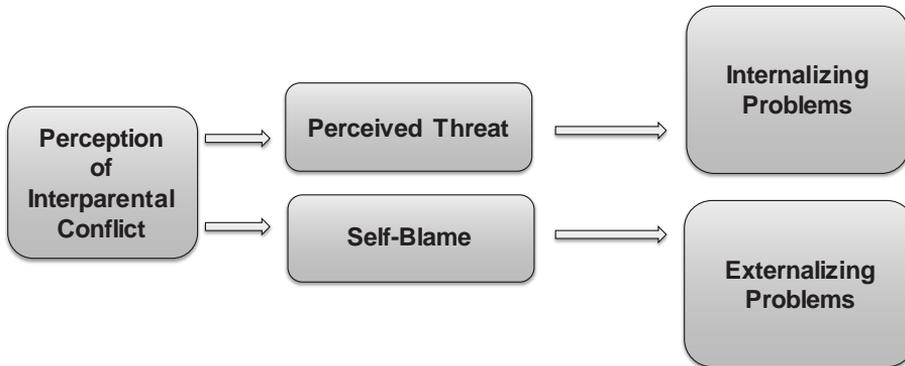
Theoretical framework

In the literature two main theoretical frameworks aimed at explaining the mechanism relating marital conflict to child adjustment are often recalled, that is, the Cognitive-Contextual Framework of Grych and Fincham (1990) and the Emotional Security Hypothesis of Davies and Cummings (1994). These models seek to understand how interparental conflict effects children's psychological and social functioning. Theoretical assumptions in the Cognitive-Contextual Framework and the Emotional Security Hypothesis are based on different paradigms.

The Cognitive-Contextual Framework. In this model the key role in explaining the relationship between interparental conflicts and child maladjustment is assigned to the child's interparental conflict appraisals (Grych & Fincham, 1990). It is assumed that children subjectively evaluate the parental interaction and capture the cause of interparental conflict, its development and consequences. Even though appraisals are typically considered purely cognitive, they may also contain some affective elements (Fosco & Grych, 2007). Interparental conflicts are noticed by children in everyday interactions and perceived by them in terms of threat and self-blame. Childrens' perceptive appraisal of conflicts between parents affects their behavioral and emotional reactions to these conflicts (e.g. Grych, Fincham, Jouriles & McDonald, 2000; Fosco & Grych, 2007).

Marital conflict's negative effects on children are observable both, as mentioned above, as internalizing problems like anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and low self-esteem; and externalizing problems like aggression, hyperactivity, delinquency, and substance abuse (cf. Acock & Demo, 1999). All these problems can be seen as a child's difficulties in psychological adjustment. The role of child's self-blame and perceived threat as being mediators of the relation between child's interparental conflict perception and the maladjustment is graphically depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Children's appraisals of interparental conflict and their functioning problems (based on Grych et al., 2000, p. 1649; Gerard et al., 2005, p. 379)



The children's appraisal of interparental conflicts is also affected by the wider context in which conflicts occur. Four factors were identified by Grych and Fincham (1990) that can influence the way children perceive and respond to conflicts between parents, namely (1) gender differences, (2) temperament, (3) family characteristics, and (4) the family's emotional climate (Fosco & Grych, 2007). As for gender differences (factor 1) some studies indicated that girls are more sensitive to parental conflicts than boys. However, this finding was not confirmed by other studies. Research results relating to factor 2 (temperament) are very scarce, in contrast to factor 3 (family characteristics), which was studied extensively leading to the conclusion that children exposed to hostile, aggressive parental conflicts tend to find disagreements to be more threatening and distressing (e.g. Davies & Cummings, 1998). The family's emotional climate (factor 4) has an effect on children's interparental conflict perceptions – an interparental dispute in an otherwise warm and supportive family is perceived by children to be less threatening than a conflict in a family with hostile interactions, because it is not really felt as a danger to family harmony and stability (cf. Fosco & Grych, 2007).

Grych and Fincham (1990) not only offered a framework enabling hypotheses to be formulated concerning the impact of marital conflicts on children but also proposed a measuring tool for assessing marital conflict from the child's perspective. The Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC) is a questionnaire comprising three subscales: 1. Conflict properties, 2. Threat, 3. Self-blame, manifesting good psychometric properties (Grych, Seid & Fincham, 1992). The CPIC questionnaire made it possible to extend the research scope to better understand the children's perspective, their perception and interpretation of conflict along with adjustment to it. In earlier studies children's exposure to interparental conflict was commonly assessed by parents,

whose estimates about children's awareness concerning their marital conflict were not always credible (Grych, Seid & Fincham, 1992).

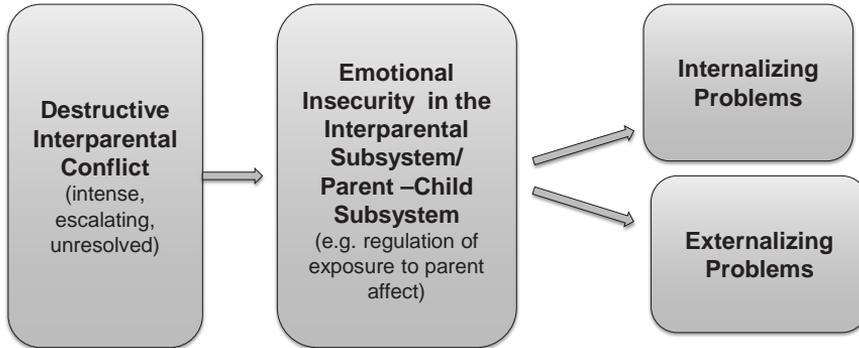
The seminal work by Grych and Fincham (1990) on how children cognitively and contextually conceptualize their appraisals and their adjustment to interparental conflicts inspired numerous research works by other authors (e.g. Gerard, Buehler, Franck & Anderson, 2005; Knisfogel & Grych, 2004; Fosco & Grych, 2007, 2010; Grych, Fincham, Jouriles & McDonald, 2000). The research results by Grych and coworkers pointed out the potential importance for cognitive appraisals (Grych, Fincham, Jouriles & McDonald, 2000). Findings by other researchers provided further support for appraisals as a mediating role and confirmed that children's beliefs about interparental conflict play a central role as an interpretive filter for their responses to this family stressor (Gerard, Buehler, Franck & Anderson, 2005).

The Emotional Security Hypothesis. In this concept elaborated by Davies and Cummings (1994, 1998) the role of child's conflict perception is emphasized, too. Similarly to the attachment security concept (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 2007) emotional security in the marital conflict context is a construct involving children's emotional security about interparental conflict (Cummings, Schemerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2006). The Emotional Security Hypothesis postulates that children's emotional security derives from the family systems, in particular from the marital system (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Papp & Dukewich, 2002). Emotional security is understood as an appraisal that family relationships remain positive and stable even if exposed to usual stressors like marital conflict, and that family members can be expected to remain approachable and emotionally available for the child even in stressful conditions (Cummings, Schemerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2006). The Emotional Security Hypothesis conceives children's emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to interparental conflict as indications that conflict is comprehended as a threat to marriage stability (Davies & Cummings, 1994; 1998).

The strategies involving children in conflict are linked with increased internalizing symptoms and externalizing problems (see Figure 2). For example, conflicts that endanger children's emotional security are likely to cause enhanced negative emotionality and efforts to control marital conflicts. Constructive conflict is assumed to be connected with non-negative emotionality, in other words, with neutral or even positive emotions, and with no increase in controlling behaviors (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Papp & Dukewich, 2002). According to Cummings, Schemerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey and Cummings (2006), if children witnessed aggression of one parent against the other they reported negative emotional reactivity and over involvement in the parents' marital dispute. Insecurity is likely to enhance one's propensity for maladaptive responding in new situations

manifested for instance, by lowered flexibility, openness and ability to form and maintain social relationships (cf. Cummings, Schemerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2006).

Figure 2. *Emotional security as a mediator of relationship between interparental conflict and children's symptomatology (internalizing or externalizing).*



(simplified model extracted from Cummings & Davies, 2002, p. 33)

According to the hypothesis by Davies and Cummings (1994, 1998) children cope with interparental conflict by over-controlling (mediation, comforting, distraction) and by avoiding (distancing, escaping) conflict in trying to preserve emotional security by engaging or disengaging from family stress (Cummings & Davies, 2002; see: Shelton, Harold, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2006). Several recent studies provided support for the clarifying mechanism resulting from the Emotional Security Hypothesis (e.g. Cummings, Davies & Simpson, 1994; Cummings, Schemerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2006; Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Papp & Dukewich, 2002).

Influence of interparental conflict on children's functioning and adjustment

Children are usually disturbed when exposed to conflicts in the home. To answer the question why this is happening one should first understand how children cope with interparental conflict. Research studies on this topic conducted since the 1980's made it possible to accumulate consistent evidence indicating that intense marital conflicts have a detrimental effect on children's social and psychological adjustment and their performance at school (Emery, 1982; Grych & Fincham, 1990; Cummings, & Davies, 1994; Shelton, Harold, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2006). Theoretical foundations for numerous research works in this field were provided by the two concepts in question,

namely the Emotional Security Hypothesis (Davies & Cummings, 1994; 1998) and the Cognitive-Contextual Framework of Grych and Fincham (1990).

Cross-sectional data and longitudinal studies collected so far give solid evidence supporting the following two main hypotheses: (1) emotional security is an essential contributor to explaining the impact that marital conflicts have on children and their adjustment (cf. Davies, Forman, Rasi, & Stevens, 2002; Harold, Shelton, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2004), and (2) children's perceptions of threat and self-blame are associated with internalizing behavior problems (Grych, Seid & Fincham, 1992; Grych, Fincham, Jouriles & McDonald, 2000; Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004). A synthetic account that has selected research results in this field is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Children's responses to interparental conflict (exemplary studies).*

Study	Sample	Results
Gerard, Buehler, Franck & Anderson (2005)	Study I – 1893 adolescents (aged 13–14 years) reported their perceptions of conflict Study II – 2416 married parents reported their conflict and youth maladjustment	Positive correlation between interparental conflict and youth maladjustment. Children's beliefs about interparental conflict were essential in their adjustment to conflict. Perceived threat, self-blame, and coping efficacy were salient mediators of high intensity conflict and triangulation, particularly for internalizing problems.
Fosco & Grych (2007)	144 children (8 to 12 years old) and their parents	Children in families of high levels of negative and low levels of positive emotions showed higher self-blame for conflict; parents' expressiveness did not predict children's threat appraisals.
Cummings, Davies & Simpson (1994)	51 children aged 9–12 years (25 boys and 26 girls) with their mothers	Appraisals of coping efficacy and threat caused by marital conflict were predictors for adjustment problems in boys; self-blame was linked with internalizing problems for girls. Boys' perceptions were better predictors of adjustment outcomes in comparison with mothers' reports.
Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Papp & Dukewich (2002)	51 couples (trained to complete home diary reports on everyday marital conflicts and children responses)	Parents' negative emotionality and destructive conflict tactics were related to children's insecure emotional and behavioral responses, whereas positive emotionality and constructive conflict tactics were linked with their secure emotional responses.
Sturge-Apple, Cummings & Davies (2006)	210 mothers, fathers, and 6 year old children (3-year period)	Interparental withdrawal had a detrimental impact on children's adjustment, whereas interparental hostility had an indirect effect on subsequent changes in child adjustment.
Sturge-Apple, Davies, Winter, Cummings & Schermerhorn (2008)	229 kindergarten children (127 girls, 102 boys, mean age – 6.0 years) with their parents in 3-year longitudinal investigation	Children's insecure representations of the interparental relationship were a significant intervening mechanism in associations between observational ratings of interparental conflict and child and teacher reports on children's emotional and other difficulties in school over a 2-year period.

Concisely reviewing the relevant results leads to the conclusion that the perceived threat mediates the association between interparental conflict and internalizing problems (e.g. Grych, Fincham, Jouriles & McDonald, 2000). Gerard, Buehler, Franck and Anderson (2005) showed a positive correlation between the indicators of interparental conflict

and children's maladjustment. Moreover, some findings confirmed that children's perceptions of interparental conflict are essential for their adjustment to this family stressor. It was also shown that the perceived threat, self-blame, and coping efficacy were salient mediators of overt conflict and triangulation, in particular for internalizing problems. Other authors support in full or in part these outcomes. For example, Ablow, Measelle, Cowan and Cowan (2009) pointed out that children at ages five and six showed a tendency to blame themselves for their parents' conflict, which partially mediated the link between marital conflict and children's internalizing symptoms.

While there is considerable evidence on children's appraisals of interparental conflict and identifying the mechanisms by which marital conflict influences children's internalizing symptoms, little is known with regard to mechanisms affecting the externalizing problems. For example, in Grych, Fincham, Jouriles & McDonald (2000) the perceived threat and self-blame were not mediators between interparental conflict and externalizing problems. On the other hand Gerard, Buehler, Franck and Anderson (2005) showed that cognitive appraisals mediate the association between perceptions of interparental conflict by early adolescents (age 13–14) and internalizing and externalizing problems. In addition, it was shown that a direct association exists between triangulation and youth externalizing problems.

According to children's reports in Ablow, Measelle, Cowan and Cowan (2009) young children's (ages 5–6) involvement in interparental conflicts mediated in part the effect of marital conflict on externalizing problems. Similar observations were made by O'Brien, Margolin, John (1995) in 83 families with preadolescent children. It became clear from children's reports that including children in marital conflicts enhanced the child's maladjustment level, whereas keeping them distant from marital conflict reduced their maladjustment. Moreover, in line with the Cognitive-Contextual Framework the significance of context factors such as emotional climate in the family, which can be helpful in understanding how children perceive and assess conflicts between their parents, was pointed out. Fosco and Grych (2007) found that children in families with high level of negative emotions and low level of positive emotions reported higher self-blame for their parents' conflict. On the other hand parental expressiveness did not predict children's threat appraisals.

Several interesting conclusions concerning emotional security in response to interparental conflict were drawn by Cummings and coauthors in a series of papers, namely:

1. The more frequent the marital conflicts, the higher the distress, lack of security and anger in children (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1981)
2. The relation between marital conflict and child security in stable parenting was mediated by the children's emotional security about interparental conflict (Cummings, Schermerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2006. Emotional security was recog-

nized as an explanatory mechanism for internalizing and externalizing problems in children (Cummings, Schermerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2006).

3. Children showing higher emotional insecurity when faced with interparental conflict had higher intense internalizing and externalizing problems (Davies & Cummings, 1998; Davies, Forman, Rasi & Stevens, 2002).
4. Negative emotionality and damaging parental conflict tactics were related with insecure emotional and behavioral reactions in children. Reciprocally, constructive conflicts were linked with children's emotional security (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, Papp & Dukewich, 2002).

A detrimental impact on interparental withdrawal was found in all child adjustment areas, namely, in internalizing symptoms, externalizing behaviors, and difficulties with scholastic adjustment. Interparental hostility affected changes in child adjustment only indirectly, and was a significantly weaker maladjustment predictor for six-year-old children than interparental withdrawal (Sturge-Apple, Cummings & Davies, 2006).

Children's vulnerability to interparental conflicts and gender differences

Gender differences in children's response to interparental conflicts has attracted many researchers. While both sexes are vulnerable to high intensity conflicts between parents (Grych & Fincham, 1990), girls show more tendency to taking responsibility for marital conflict, which may result in self-blame (Cummings, Vogel, Cummings & El-Sheikh, 1989). Consequently, girls are more prone to developing internalizing (depressing emotions or sadness) rather than externalizing problems (Cummings, Vogel, Cummings & El-Sheikh, 1989; Emery, 1982). The more destructive the marital conflict, the greater the sense among girls in taking responsibility for parents' arguments (Cummings, Vogel, Cummings & El-Sheikh, 1989). The finding for boys was different: with increasing marital conflict intensity, boys showed more anger and aggression, which might reflect their greater threat perception (Cummings et al., 1989). Appraisals of threat were, in turn, likely to increase as marital conflict became more destructive (Cummings, Davies and Simpson, 1994).

Content of marital conflict and children's responses

It has been shown that marital conflicts, which concern children are more upsetting for them than conflicts unrelated to children (e.g. Grych & Fincham, 1993). Furthermore, if conflicts between parents are intense, accompanied with verbal aggression, contain child-related elements, and are not properly resolved, then their impact on children

is particularly negative because it is perceived as emotionally more distressing and threatening (Shelton, Harold, Goeke-Morey, Cummings, 2006). Research results by Grych and Fincham (1993) indicate that verbal aggression and hostility exacerbate children's negative emotions, self-blame and fear that conflict may escalate and pull them in. Conflicts whose content was child-related induced in children a stronger feeling of shame, self-blame and conviction that the child could help find a solution to the marital conflict. Intense conflicts may pose a threat to children's sense of safety and raise various fears, for example, divorce. Child-related conflicts can end up with self-derogating cognitions and more active children's engagement in their parents' arguments. Interestingly, younger children may blame themselves more easily for their parents' conflicts (Fincham, Grych & Osborne, 1994).

If marital conflict is related to the child it raises shame and self-blame in children and stimulates them to intervening in their parents' conflict (Grych & Fincham, 1993). Shelton, Harold, Goeke-Morey and Cummings (2006) found that children are prone to interfere in a conflict for which they feel responsible. Conflict intensity and potential physical risk and psychological hurt are for them much less important. In contrast conflicts not related to children that are less hostile and resolved constructively are less stressful for them even if they occur relatively often (Grych & Fincham, 1990; Fincham, Grych & Osborne, 1994). Children seem to be less affected by conflicts when parents tell them that the marital conflict has been resolved (Cummings, Simpson & Wilson, 1993).

How children cope with marital conflict

Children cope with marital conflicts, especially conflicts accompanied with interparental anger, in different ways (cf. O'Brien, Margolin & John, 1995; Shelton, Harold, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2006). Generally, they tend to intervene in marital conflicts trying to find solutions or relief for their parents. Children's strategies when faced with marital conflict may be active (involving mediation) or passive (by withdrawal or avoidance). According to Shelton, Harold, Goeke-Morey and Cummings (2006) on sampling 398 children (208 boys and 190 girls) aged 12–13 years, children would rather mediate conflicts initiated by fathers than mothers. An interesting observation from the same study is that children's strategies based on conflict avoidance did not prove to be uniformly protective. Frequently used conflict avoidance strategy may prevent children from reaching for more effective strategies to cope with interparental conflict.

An analysis of available research shows that high intensity conflict and verbal anger between parents generates negative feelings in children, accompanied with enhanced fear, irritation and sadness. This is quite upsetting for children because it may put at risk

family relations. Less intense marital conflicts with concealed mutual hostility were also upsetting for children, because “nonverbal anger and the use of silent treatment” causes fear in children that conflict may not get resolved. Also, when a parent withdraws from a marital relationship it represents a major distress to the child, who may thereby experience adjustment problems (for reviews see: Shelton, Harold, Goeke-Morey and Cummings, 2006).

Marital conflict and parent-child relationship

Repeated marital conflicts, if not resolved constructively, are likely not only to negatively affect children’s functioning in the family and their adjustment, but may also risk impairing the parent-child relationship. To this end three main parent-child categories can be distinguished (Snyder, 1998). The first category is concerned with inconsistencies in discipline. Parents in conflict employ less effective corrective strategies towards their children’s and monitor their behavior with reduced attention. The second is concerned with a marital conflict’s “spillover” effect on the parent-child relationship with potentially disruptive consequences (e.g. increased aggression toward the child). The third category is connected with emotional links between the parent and child. If marital conflicts occur often they result in parents’ emotional exhaustion and reduce their capability to identify and react to children’s emotional needs. This in turn may be perceived by children as rejection and cause various deteriorating effects in their adjustment and development (Fincham, Grych & Osborne, 1994; see for review Snyder, 1998).

Methodological problems: parents’ versus children’s reports about marital discord

Research studies using data from parents’ and children’s reports started relatively early because it had soon been recognized that parents might underestimate children’s awareness of marital conflicts or children might concentrate on different facets of marital conflicts than parents (Grych, Seid & Fincham, 1992). According to observations by Emery and Leary (1982) children’s assessments of interparental conflicts may more adequately predict those conflicts than their parents’ reports do. Further studies have confirmed these hypotheses. Cummings, Davis and Simpson (1994) found that in 51 children aged 9–12 years from intact families, boys’ perceptions of marital conflict were more accurate predictors of children’s adjustment than reports by their mothers. Similar conclusions were formulated by Davern, Steiger and Luk (2005) in their study of 14–16 years old. Here, adolescent psychological adjustment was a better predictor than those

by their parents. Such studies emphasize the importance of child and adolescent perceptions concerning interparental conflict, and that it is necessary to collect data from both sources, that is, from children and parents alike.

Parent education programs as protective interventions for children

As research on the effect of marital conflicts on children adjustment and disruption in parent-child relation pattern has progressed, practitioners followed by researchers have focused on devising parental educational programs and monitoring their efficiency. Among marital intervention programs, inspired by the theoretical guidelines and based on empirical research results, those proposed by Faircloth and Cummings (2008; see also Faircloth, Schemerhorn, Mitchell, Cummings & Cummings, 2011) known as “Optimal marital intervention-programs” are worth mentioning. These programs comprise the following elements: a) education about empirically-based information for expressing and negotiating marital conflict for the sake of children, (b) practical skills training aimed at transforming destructive arguments into constructive discussions. An underlying assumption is that parental education about conflict consequences and a more effective approach to its resolution will lead to increase in constructive marital conflicts, decreases in destructive marital conflicts, and to positive changes in other family functions placing them in longer perspective due to well-established interrelations between marital conflict, parenting and child adjustment (Faircloth & Cummings, 2008; Faircloth, Schemerhorn, Mitchell, Cummings & Cummings, 2011). In particular, it was expected that improvements in marital conflict were interrelated with improvements in parenting and child issues. The parents were not confronted with the question whether they had a conflict but rather how they were going to deal with it. It was a way to understand that differentiation between constructive and destructive behaviors in marital conflicts have an essential impact on the well-being of spouses and children (Sturge-Apple, Cummings & Davies, 2006; see also Faircloth, Schemerhorn, Mitchell, Cummings & Cummings, 2011).

Faircloth and Cummings (2008) investigated effectiveness of an educational program for preventing negative marital conflicts. Their analyses showed that the program had a positive impact on parents’ understanding their marital conflicts at different assessment times. Less interparental anger in the presence of children was reported at six months, while better conflict tactics and parenting care was reported after six months and 12 months. These outcomes are encouraging for further research and expansion on conflict tactics.

Long term effectiveness of a prevention program for improving marital conflict was investigated by Faircloth, Schemerhorn, Mitchell, Cummings and Cummings (2011) on couples with children aged between four and eight years with a follow up after 24

months. The outcome confirmed the long-term effectiveness of short-term psychoeducational programs for parents focused on marital conflicts and family processes. Two years following program completion, the participants had a greater awareness of their marital conflicts influence on the family and manifested improved behavior in constructive conflict resolution. These changes were associated with positive changes in marital satisfaction, parenting, and child adjustment. It is worth stressing that this psychoeducational program was based on theoretical models resulting from the emotional security theory (Davies & Cummings, 1994) and the attachment theory (Faircloth, Schemerhorn, Mitchell, Cummings, & Cummings, 2011), where developing and maintaining strong emotional bonds during marital conflict were emphasized.

Summary and conclusions

While interparental disagreements usually occur in family life, if not constructively resolved they may create marital distress affecting not only couple's satisfaction but also children's security and their psychological and social functioning. Research findings reviewed in this paper show that children are very sensitive to interparental conflicts. Involving them in such conflicts may increase the risk of child maladjustment, especially in aggressive child-related conflicts that are not constructively resolved. Children use different coping strategies, such as mediation, comforting, distraction and avoidance (distancing, escape).

The aim of this paper was to gain a better understanding about the effects of marital conflict on children through comprehensively analysing existing research results. To this end two main theoretical models of mechanisms linking marital conflict to child adjustment were presented: the Cognitive-Contextual Framework of Grych and Fincham (1990) and Emotional Security Hypothesis of Davies and Cummings (1994) which builds on the attachment theory.

This analysis has shown that marital conflicts are associated with numerous adjustment difficulties in children, including problems with cognition, emotional responses, behavioral responses, and physiological responses. Children's emotional reactions and behavior during marital conflicts may be positive, neutral or negative, depending on parental conflict resolution patterns. Children's reactions to interparental conflict are mediated or moderated by various variables such as children's emotional security, feeling at fault for their parents' conflict, and feeling threatened by parental relationship arguments. In addition some contextual factors such as family characteristics, the family's emotional climate, and children's gender and their temperament may have an impact on children's emotional reactions and behavior in interparental conflicts. They interpret and respond to their par-

ents' conflicts and try to cope with them, although many of the children's conflict coping strategies are far from being adaptive due to their high emotional-cognitive costs (e.g. internalizing problems such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem).

It has been shown that parental destructive – both verbal and non-verbal – conflict behaviors are associated with children's behavioral problems. In contrast, the parents' positive emotionality and their efforts in conflict resolution and constructiveness are classified as constructive conflict behaviors leading to children's positive or neutral reactions.

A legitimate question arises concerning what parents can do to ameliorate the impact of their conflicts on children? A positive answer to this question is offered by educational programs for preventing the negative effects of marital conflicts as shown by the follow-up studies discussed in the preceding section. Our review of theoretical models and research results may be both informative and inspirational for undertaking new research projects on this relationship as many mechanisms remain unexplored. Finally, one could think of new psychoeducational programs for parents regarding marital conflict impacts on children, and the large parental potential for improved conflict management. For high-conflict couples in separation or divorce, family mediation could be considered as a protective factor for children in facilitating their adjustment (cf. Przybyła-Basista, 2015).

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Conflict styles and outcomes in parent-adolescent relationship and adolescent family satisfaction

Streszczenie

W artykule określono znaczenie konfliktów w relacji między adolescentami i ich rodzicami dla satysfakcji adolescentów z życia rodzinnego. Stwierdzono pozytywny związek satysfakcji z dążeniem rodziców do kompromisu oraz negatywny – z agresją rodziców. Satysfakcja adolescentów jest tym większa, im częściej konflikty z ojcem kończą się poprawą relacji (intymność) a im rzadziej konflikty z matką kończą się ich eskalacją i frustracją. Potwierdzono istotną rolę zachowania każdego z rodziców w sytuacji konfliktu z adolescentem, jednakże najsilniejszym predyktorem satysfakcji adolescentów jest dążenie ojca do kompromisu. Zgodnie z hipotezą emocjonalnego dystansowania się Steinberga, wraz z wiekiem adolescenta zmniejsza się jego satysfakcja z rodziny a coraz częściej dochodzi do eskalacji konfliktów i narastania frustracji w relacji z matką.

Słowa kluczowe

adolescencja, satysfakcja z życia rodziny, style rozwiązywania konfliktu, rezultaty konfliktów

Abstract

In my article I identified the meaning of conflict in parent-adolescent relationship for adolescent family satisfaction. It was found that family satisfaction is positively related to seeking compromise by the parents, as well as being negatively related to parental aggression. Adolescent satisfaction is higher when conflicts with the father more often result in improving their relationship (intimacy), and when conflicts with the mother end less frequently with escalation and frustration. A significant parental behavioral role in conflict with the adolescent was confirmed; however, the strongest predictor of adolescent family satisfaction is in seeking compromise by the father. In accordance with Steinberg's emotional distancing hypothesis, with the adolescent's age family satisfaction was found to decrease, and conflicts escalated and frustration in mother-adolescent relationship increased.

Keywords

adolescence, family satisfaction, conflict style, conflict outcome

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Introduction

Subjective well-being created an attractive studies area in modern psychology. Great interest in these topics is undoubtedly related to the developments in positive psychology in recent years (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Studies on subjective well-being of children and adolescents take an important place in this field. For instance, Diener and colleagues (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999) analysed demographic factors and resources influencing subjective well-being. Their results point to a large role played by life events, both major and daily events (McCullough, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000). Since conflicts with parents are a big part of their everyday life, can be resolved in different ways, and have different outcomes, a question arises: what do such conflicts mean for adolescent well-being?

In psychology the research on well-being is conducted in two major philosophical traditions: hedonic and eudemonic (Czapiński, 2015; Trzebińska, 2008), the former being used in my study. In this light subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as “a broad category of phenomena that includes people’s emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction” (Diener et al., 1999). Diener and colleagues (Diener, Suh, Oishi, 1997) propose that well-being reflects satisfaction with life, pleasant affect, and low unpleasant affect levels. Satisfaction with life is the cognitive subjective well-being component and can be assessed independently from the context. What is evaluated then, is how individuals are generally satisfied with their life. However, Diener and collaborators (1997) propose that “global satisfaction can be distinguished as satisfaction with the various domains of life”, which can result in life satisfaction being – depending on the researcher’s aim – limited to a specific context. In adults it is usually career, romantic relationship, and for youth this specific context is school and family. Diener and colleagues (1997) believe that studying well-being concentrated on a narrow context allows for a better understanding of specific conditions influencing it. My study focuses on one aspect of the hedonistically approached subjective well-being: satisfaction. The focus, however, is put on family – a very important area for adolescent life. Family satisfaction is defined as “the degree to which family members feel happy and fulfilled with each other” (Olson, 2016). Analyzing the processes related to SWB, Diener (1984) distinguishes bottom-up and top-down processes. Bottom-up processes determine external factors which impact SWB, namely, various situations, external events, and demographics. Studies show that even though personality traits and affect dispositions are good predictors of long-term subjective well-being, situational variables, such daily events or interactions with other people explain short-term well-

being (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Among situational factors, the relationship with parents is especially central for an adolescent's well-being. Effective parenthood, next to relationships with peers, is considered an essential variable in a youth's development and their life satisfaction. Analyzing many studies, Mupinga, Garrison and Pierce (2002) propose that parents should adjust their expectations and discipline to their child's capabilities so that they can develop social responsibility without curbing their independence and individuality. On the basis of 19 interviews with non-clinical adolescents, Joronen and Astedt-Kurki (2005) identified six elements significant in their life satisfaction: emotionally warm atmosphere, comfortable home, familial involvement, sense of personal significance in the family, possibilities for external relations and open communication. Factors contributing to low well-being were ill-being or death of a family member excessive dependency, and familial hostility. Their data show that good communication and lack of hostility in family relations are important factors in adolescent life satisfaction.

Families with an adolescent child experience a transformation of relationships, so how both parties behave is crucial in this process (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). Scalars stress that for these renegotiated relationships to have positive outcomes, conflicts are indispensable (Collins, 1990). Hence, communication and ability to resolve conflicts are significant factors bringing positive changes in family relations with an adolescent child.

From the social psychology perspective, conflict is defined as perceived incompatibilities of the views, wishes, and desires that are held by each party in the conflict (De Dreu, Havinck, & VanVianen, 1999, as cited in Bell & Song, 2005). Conflict is often a relational phenomenon arising between two independent parties engaged in a common activity (Bell & Song, 2005). These two characteristics, simultaneous competition and cooperation make conflict a complex situation. Experts agree that conflict is neither positive nor negative in nature, but is rather an unavoidable consequence of change and growth (Crum, 1987, as cited in Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). It can be assumed that conflict, being a transformational reflection and renegotiation of relations, will eventually appear between parents and adolescents. How a particular disagreement is resolved may lead to different outcomes. Fisher, Ury and Patron (1991, as cited in Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000) believe that conflict has negative consequences when one or both parties adopt a "win-lose" approach. In such a case disputes are rarely resolved and new disagreements are more likely to arise. In turn, conflicts are resolved effectively when each party cooperates in finding solutions which will fulfil everyone's needs. Therefore, the crucial element of effective dispute resolution is willingness to work together (Fisher, Ury, & Patron, 1991, as cited in Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000).

Effective communication is generally perceived as a fundamental characteristic of a well-functioning family. It helps in defining one's position in the family, developing sensitivity to needs and feelings of others, supports individuality and connectedness as well as independence, autonomy, which facilitates individuation (Jackson, Bistra, Oostera, & Bosma 1998). Adolescents growing up in families with good communication skills are more satisfied with their family as well as their lives in general, have higher self-esteem, feel healthier and are happier (Jackson et al., 1998). Their results show that the way a family copes with conflict affects the well-being of children, spouses and the family as a whole (Cox & Paley, 1997; Cummings & Davies, 2002).

A conflict's important aspects are its style and outcomes. Conflict style is defined as "a patterned response to conflict involving the repeated use of the same tactics to resolve disputes" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1991, as cited in Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000). It describes how an individual usually reacts to the other person in a dispute. In turn, conflict outcomes are described as its results, which are caused by how both parties behave. There are two conflict style dimensions: compromise and aggression. Seeking compromise includes behaviors such as listening to the partner, reasoning, putting forward arguments, striving for a settlement, and caring for the partner. On other hand, aggression is understood as anger, sarcasm and shouting (Honest et al., 1997). Conflict outcomes which are most often studied in research are escalation, frustration and intimacy (Honest et al., 1997). Escalation is experienced when conflict behaviors lead to more inclusive issues in the argument and in using what has been said against the other person. Frustration is understood as ending up feeling hurt, annoyed, and thinking that the argument was a waste of time. In turn, intimacy involves better understanding, feeling sorry. In some cases, the parties accept that it is possible to have different views (Honest et al., 1997).

My aim in the present article is to determine what conflict styles and outcomes mean in a parent-adolescent relationship, separately for the mother and the father and for the adolescent's family satisfaction. In order to meet my goal, conflict styles and outcomes as perceived by adolescents were analyzed.

Honest and colleagues (1997) quote the results of studies which found that mothers and fathers exert different types of influence on the adolescent. The relationship with the mother is more complex and is more often characterized by partnership, equality and intimacy, in comparison to the relations with the father. Adolescents state that they talk to their mother more than to the father, and view her as more understanding and accepting. In contrast, the father is experienced as showing authority, passing judgment, and being less willing to talk about personal issues and feelings (Youniss & Smolar, 1985, as cited in Jackson et al., 1998). Goeke and Cummings (2007) state that "fathers may contribute more to some

child development aspects, or in different ways, than mothers” (p. 221). Results of studies in attachment theory show that the safe attachment style with both the father and the mother has positive consequences socially and cognitively; however, attachment style outcomes with the father are independent of the attachment style effects with the mother. When the father is engaged in having a relationship with the child in the early stages of his or her development, a safe attachment style is formed, which is in turn related to other positive outcomes (Pleck, 2007). In turn, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory (1986, as cited in Pleck, 2007) proposes that the father functions as a microsystem partner and interacting with him promotes development. However, he is not an additional partner in the child’s microsystem; together, they create a separate system, different from the one formed with the mother. Based on the abovementioned discussion, in my study the adolescent relationships with both parents were analyzed. It is expected that the conflict style displayed separately by the mother and the father as well as conflict outcomes will be related to family satisfaction in adolescents (Fig. 1):

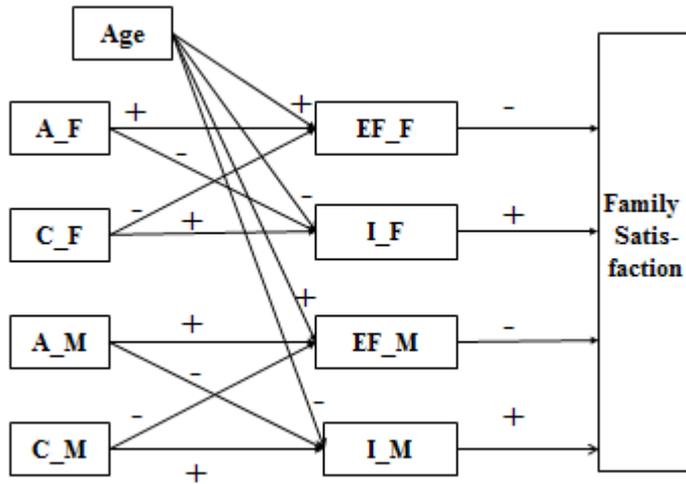
H 1. Father and mother aggression as well as father and mother conflict escalation are negatively related to adolescent family satisfaction.

H 2. Father and mother compromise as well as father and mother intimacy are positively related to adolescent family satisfaction.

It is believed that independence and a tendency to emphasize differences is typical for adolescence (Cooper & Awers-Lopez, 1985, as cited in Honess et al., 1997). At this time young people extend their social circles, express themselves in new ways and become more autonomous, which may generate tension and create conflicts with parents (Jackson et al., 1998). In accordance with Steinberg’s distancing hypothesis (1988), emotional distance is created between the teenager and their parents. Thus, it is proposed that (Fig. 1):

H 3. With age adolescents experience more frustration and escalation, and less intimacy, as conflict outcomes with the father and mother.

Figure 1. Theoretical model of correlations between parental conflict styles and conflict outcomes, adolescent age and their family satisfaction.



EF_F – Escalation and frustration outcome (father); I_F – Intimacy outcome (father); EF_M – Escalation and frustration outcome (mother); I_M – Intimacy outcome (mother); A_F – Aggression (father); C_F – Compromise (father); A_M – Aggression (mother); C_M – Compromise (mother)

Materials and Methods

The study participants were 177 students aged 11 to 17 ($M = 13.72$; $SD = 1.06$), including 89 boys. All the participants come from families with two parents present in the family life.

To measure conflict styles and outcomes the Polish version (Lachowska, 2010) of Disagreement Questionnaires by Honess and colleagues (1997) was used. They include measuring conflict styles (aggression and compromise) and conflict outcomes (escalation, frustration and intimacy) which are important because they inflict changes in the adolescent's environment (Honess et al., 1997). The adolescent is required to describe his or her father's and mother's behavior: "How well does each of the following statements describe YOUR FATHER/YOUR MOTHER/ when you and he/she/ disagree about something which is important to both of you?" Answers are provided on a four-point scale: 1 – not at all, 2 – not too well, 3 – fairly well, 4 – very well. In the aggression scale the maximum value is 28, the minimum is seven, in the compromise scale the possible results range from five to 20. A higher score indicates a stronger intensity of a given parental behavioral type.

Both scales are homogeneous, which is indicated by internal reliability coefficients for aggression $\alpha = 0.88$, and for compromise $\alpha = 0.80$ (Lachowska, 2010).

Concerning questionnaires examining conflict outcomes, the adolescent is required to think about disagreement outcomes with father or mother: „Different things can happen when two people have a serious disagreement. How often does each of these things happen when YOU and your FATHER/or MOTHER/disagree about something which is important to both of you?” Answers are provided on a five-point scale: 1 – never, 2 – almost never, 3 – once in a while, 4 – fairly often, 5 – very often. In escalation and frustration the possible scores range from 11 to 55, in intimacy the score ranges from sixties to 30. A higher score indicates a stronger effect. Both scales are homogeneous, as indexed by *alpha* coefficients for escalation and frustration $\alpha = 0.87$, for intimacy $\alpha = 0.77$ (Lachowska, 2010).

Family satisfaction was assessed using the Polish version (Lachowska, 2008) of a 10-item scale developed by Olson (2016). The family satisfaction scale is based on a 14-item scale developed by Olson and Wilson (1982). The scale was designed to assess satisfaction with various family aspects including family closeness, flexibility and communication. The participants state how satisfied they are with different family life aspects for example, the degree of closeness between family members. Subjects rated their experiences on a five-point scale ranging from 1- very dissatisfied, to 5- extremely satisfied. The possible score ranges from 10 to 50, where a higher score indicates higher satisfaction with family functioning. The original and Polish scales have high internal reliability indicators (Cronbach’s *alpha*), which is $\alpha = 0.92$ for the original, and $\alpha = 0.95$ for the Polish version.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, and Table 2 shows Pearson’s *r* coefficients between the variables.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics among the variables

Variable	M	SD	Wynik minimalny	Wynik maksymalny	Skośność	Kurtoza
Aggression (father)	1.96	0.74	1.00	3.86	0.393	-0.827
Compromise (father)	2.77	0.71	1.00	4.00	-0.231	-0.537
Aggression (mother)	2.18	0.82	1.00	4.00	0.114	-1.032
Compromise (mother)	2.71	0.71	1.00	4.00	-0.133	-0.548

Variable	M	SD	Wynik minimalny	Wynik maksymalny	Skośność	Kurtoza
Escalation and frustration outcome (father)	2.48	0.88	1.00	4.45	0.194	-0.733
Intimacy outcome (father)	2.93	0.83	1.00	4.83	-0.065	-0.277
Escalation and frustration outcome (mother)	2.49	0.89	1.00	4.82	0.230	-0.667
Intimacy outcome (mother)	2.88	0.81	1.00	4.83	0.057	-0.288
Family Satisfaction	37.06	7.79	15	50	-0.507	0.030
Age	13.72	1.06	11	17	0.147	-0.351

M – mean; SD – standard deviation; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Correlations between family satisfaction, conflict scales and age of the adolescents

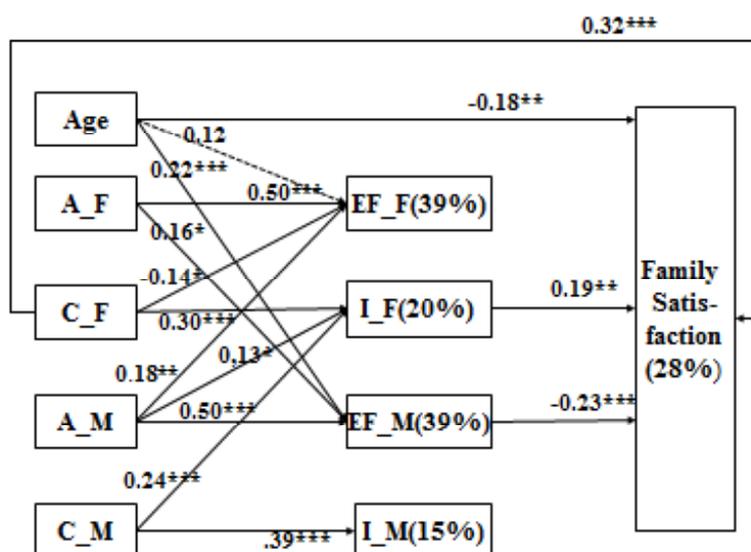
Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Family satisfaction	–								
2. Age	-0.23**	–							
3. Aggression (father)	-0.09	-0.07	–						
4. Compromise (father)	0.40***	0.03	-0.11	–					
5. Aggression (mother)	-0.06	0.04	0.38***	-0.04	–				
6. Compromise (mother)	0.25***	-0.08	-0.12	0.31***	-0.06	–			
7. Escalation and frustration outcome (father)	-0.15*	0.12	0.58***	-0.19**	0.37***	-0.08	–		
8. Intimacy outcome (father)	0.27***	0.03	0.01	0.38***	0.10	0.34***	0.19**	–	
9. Escalation and frustration outcome (mother)	-0.25***	0.23**	0.33***	0.04	0.57***	-0.09	0.55***	0.14	–
10. Intimacy outcome (mother)	0.20**	0.04	0.04	0.16*	-0.03	0.40***	0.16*	0.45***	0.03

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS for SPSS 22 was used (Arbuckle, 2007). Structural Equation Modeling allows one to specify and estimate models

of linear relationships between the variables. In the present study, explorative and confirmative factor analyses were carried out, which means that the model which had been created using theoretical knowledge (Fig. 1) was tested and subsequently modified (Perek-Białas & Górnica, 2008). The model was fitted by eliminating paths with insignificant loadings and introducing new paths according to modification indices (Kline, 2005). The obtained fit indices of the final model (Fig. 2) are [$\chi^2(15) = 9.78$; $p = 0.83$; $CMIN/df = 0.65$; $GFI = 0.989$; $AGFI = 0.965$, $RMSEA < 0.001$ ($LO < 0.001$; $HI = 0.43$; $PCLOSE = 0.97$), $NFI = 0.978$; $CFI = 1.00$; $RFI = 0.934$] and show that the model fits variance and covariance matrices, which allows one to conclude that it is a useful reproduction of the reality.

Figure 2. Standardized path coefficients for age of the adolescents, parental conflict styles and outcomes and family satisfaction.



EF_F – Escalation and frustration outcome (father); I_F – Intimacy outcome (father); EF_M – Escalation and frustration outcome (mother); I_M – Intimacy outcome (mother); A_F – Aggression (father); C_F – Compromise (father); A_M – Aggression (mother); C_M – Compromise (mother)

The analyses show that father and mother conflict styles are significantly related to adolescent family satisfaction. It was found that the strongest predictor of family satisfaction is when the father compromises (standardized total effect was 0.37, Table 3). It was shown that the father’s compromise influences adolescent family satisfaction mainly directly (0.32), and partially indirectly through intimacy with the father, which was brought about by the compromising behaviors. The effect of other parental conflict styles is weaker and indirect: it is caused by conflict outcomes. The mother compromise

is related to higher family satisfaction in the adolescent (0.05), as long as such behavior improves the adolescent-father relationship and increases intimacy between them.

In turn, father aggression is related to lower family satisfaction in adolescents when it causes conflict escalation and frustration in the relationship with the mother (0.04). Mother aggression is related to lower family satisfaction if it leads to conflict escalation and increasing adolescent frustration (-0.09). Among the two conflict outcomes, only father intimacy and mother escalation and frustration are significantly related to the adolescent family satisfaction. In other words, adolescent family satisfaction is higher when conflicts with the father more frequently result in intimacy, and conflicts with the mother less frequently end with escalation and frustration. Furthermore, a relatively strong predictor of family satisfaction is adolescent age. As the teenagers get older, their family satisfaction decreases (-0.23), but this effect is mainly direct (-0.18); it is indirect to a lesser extent, through mother escalation and frustration (standardized regression coefficient -0.05). All the variables explain together 28% of family satisfaction.

Table 3. Standardized direct and total effects

	β	95% Confidence Interval		Two tailed significance
		Lower bounds	Upper bounds	
Standardized direct effects				
Age → Family Satisfaction	-0.18	-0.312	-0.055	0.007
Age → Escalation and frustration outcome (father)	0.12	-0.003	0.234	0.054
Age → Escalation and frustration outcome (mother)	0.22	0.116	0.324	0.004
Aggression(father) → Escalation and frustration outcome (father)	0.50	0.369	0.628	0.002
Aggression(father) → Escalation and frustration outcome (mother)	0.16	0.011	0.294	0.029
Compromise (father) → Escalation and frustration outcome (father)	-0.14	-0.265	-0.007	0.039
Compromise (father) → Intimacy outcome (father)	0.30	0.116	0.463	0.007
Aggression(mother) → Escalation and frustration outcome (father)	0.18	0.048	0.319	0.009
Aggression(mother) → Intimacy outcome (father)	0.13	0.002	0.258	0.047
Aggression(mother) → Escalation and frustration outcome (mother)	0.50	0.353	0.642	0.007

	β	95% Confidence Interval		Two tailed significance
		Lower bounds	Upper bounds	
Compromise (mother) → Intimacy outcome (father)	0.24	0.102	0.387	0.003
Compromise (mother) → Intimacy outcome (mother)	0.39	0.243	0.519	0.005
Intimacy outcome (father) → Family Satisfaction	0.19	0.021	0.363	0.024
Escalation and frustration outcome (mother) → Family Satisfaction	-0.23	-0.361	-0.078	0.009
Compromise (father) → Family Satisfaction	0.32	0.149	0.456	0.006
Standardized total effects				
Age → Family Satisfaction	-0.23	-0.358	-0.104	0.004
Aggression(father) → Family Satisfaction	-0.04	-0.102	-0.007	0.015
Compromise(father) → Family Satisfaction	0,37	0,226	0,496	0,004
Aggression(mother) → Family Satisfaction	-0.09	-0.165	-0.006	0.029
Compromise(mother) → Family Satisfaction	0.05	0.011	0.121	0.008

Discussion

The aim of my study was to analyze father and mother behavior in a conflict situation with the adolescent, in relation to adolescent family satisfaction. According to the expectations, parental aggression was found to decrease family satisfaction (Hypothesis 1), and compromise was found to increase it (Hypothesis 2), for the relations with both the father and the mother. Moreover, results were expected showing that intimacy (Hypothesis 2) and avoiding escalated frustration (Hypothesis 1) encourages adolescent family satisfaction. Intimacy was found to be significant in conflict outcome with the father, and the lack of escalation and frustration as conflict outcome with the mother were also anticipated. What we found especially important was that the results point to the central role of the father in forming adolescent family satisfaction. As it turns out, father compromise and seeking conflict resolution which improves the adolescent-father relationship have the biggest impact on family satisfaction. In this case father behavior is related to adolescent satisfaction mainly directly: increasing family satisfaction, as well as indirectly: through intimacy outcome, even though this correlation is much weaker. The present study showed the father as an integral member of the family. The analyses allowed us to determine the meaning of father behavior, next to mother behavior, in forming adolescent

well-being. The results led to the conclusion that a good relationship between father and children is a crucial, but often neglected, resource in adolescent development. This finding enabled us to confirm past hypotheses (e.g. Honess et al., 1997) on the different, but equally important role of each parent in child development.

Our study confirmed Steinberg's emotional distancing hypothesis (1988). We show that with adolescent age this growing emotional distance is expressed in decreased family satisfaction and escalation of conflict with the mother, which results in a rising frustration. It needs to be stressed that distancing was reported only in the relationship with the mother. It is maybe linked to the specificity of this relation which is more intimate than the one with the father (Honess et al., 1997; Jackson et al., 1998). The result showing that emotional distancing is related to conflict escalation and frustration, but is not related to intimacy (which makes Hypothesis 3 partially confirmed) also seems to be important. It can be concluded that even though emotional distancing is expressed in lower family satisfaction and rising conflict and frustration with the mother, it does not mean that intimacy in the relationship with both parents is reduced.

It is necessary to point out potential limitations of the study. Firstly, since the analyses were correlational in nature, the longitudinal design of subsequent research is called-for to verify the results. Secondly, using self-report measures can be viewed as a limitation as well. However, taking into consideration the nature of the variables, which refer to how an individual feels about their family life and how they perceive parental behavior, it seems that using self-reports was a necessity and was not possible to replace them with observation. Another limitation is the restricted use of the results, which is caused by the fact that the participants were not a representative sample of the population.

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Psychological aspects of sibling relational conflict vs. mental wellbeing levels in women's perceptions

Streszczenie

Celem prezentowanych badań była analiza zjawiska konfliktu relacyjnego z rodzeństwem w percepcji dorosłych sióstr oraz przeanalizowanie jego wybranych uwarunkowań. Rozpatrywano także różnicujące znaczenie nasilenia konfliktu relacyjnego z rodzeństwem w zakresie doświadczania dobrostanu psychicznego. W badaniach uczestniczyło 240 kobiet w okresie dorosłości, pochodzących z województwa łódzkiego. Zastosowane narzędzia badawcze: Kwestionariusz Relacji Dorosłego Rodzeństwa (KRDR) C.Stockera i in. (1997) w adaptacji K.Wałęckiej-Matyja (2014) oraz Skalę Mental Health Continuum-Short Form C.L.M. Keyes'a (2008) w adaptacji D.Karaś i in. (2014). Uzyskane rezultaty badań stanowiły podstawę do sformułowania wniosku o ambiwalentnym rodzaju więzi między rodzeństwem w okresie dorosłości, jednoznacznie wskazując na zróżnicowanie występowania konfliktu relacyjnego w zależności o wieku badanych sióstr. W badaniach nie potwierdzono istotności roli konstelacji płci w zakresie doświadczania ogólnego dobrostanu przez badane kobiety. Zweryfikowano natomiast hipotezę o znaczącej roli wieku dla poziomu dobrostanu psychicznego.

Słowa kluczowe

rodzeństwo, konflikt, dorosłość, dobrostan psychiczny.

Abstract

My research aim was to analyse sibling relational conflicts perceived by adult sisters and selected conflict determinants. The study also considered the discriminating significance of the sibling relational conflict intensity for experiencing mental wellbeing. The study included 240 adult women, coming from the Łódź district ($M=41.94$ $SD=15.71$). The following research instruments were applied: Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (ASRQ) by C.Stocker et al. (1997) in its – adapted form by K. Wałęcka-Matyja (2014), and Mental Health Continuum-Short Form by C.L.M. Keyes (2008) as adapted by D. Karaś et al. (2014). The research results allowed us to conclude about ambivalent kinds of bonds between siblings in adulthood, clearly indicating variation in the relational conflicts depending on the examined sisters' ages. However, the study did not confirm the significance

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of gender constellation for experiencing general wellbeing by the examined women. It did verify the hypothesis that there is a significant role for age-level psychological well-being.

Keywords

siblings, conflict, adulthood, mental wellbeing.

Introduction

The significance of close relationships in many human areas has been discussed time and again in numerous studies and in the richly documented psychological and sociological literature (Agryle, 2004; Szlendak, 2012; Janicka, Janicka, 2014). These relationships are an essential element of a person's mental wellbeing, affecting their happiness, contentment and satisfaction with life. In the researchers' reflections, human relationships are interpreted from both the dyadic relationship perspective and the family relationship one. Emphasized are the relationship patterns shaped in the period of early ontogenesis with a significant person who determines the course and the relationship quality with the wider social environment (Mahler, Mc Divitt, 1980; Stierlin, 1983; Bowlby, 1980). Analysing the related literature, it can be noticed that social sibling relationships have aroused less interest among researchers so far than other types of interactions in the family system, for example, mother-child, and parents-children, though, they are considered not less important for a human's adaptation to the surrounding social reality (Feinberg et al., 2012; Myers, 2015). This can be understood as it is exceptionally difficult to carry out research on the relationships occurring in the family system. However, it is necessary to identify them since human life becomes longer and siblings have an opportunity to maintain contact with each other much longer than ever before. Moreover, new technologies, especially in communication (e.g. mobile phones, Internet), and the ease in travelling long distances (cars, planes) have modified the conditions for sibling interaction, and this is connected with a bigger diversity of these relationships than in the past.

These phenomena bring about new challenges for many knowledge fields, including family psychology. Additionally, in adulthood many people face numerous stressful life events, such as divorce, job loss, health loss, and death of a close person. Proper sibling relationships can prevent a significant lowering of life comfort, affecting mental health and life satisfaction.

Research results on adult sibling relationships emphasize their complex and ambivalent nature due to the interweaving relationships of warmth, fondness, conflict, jealousy and rivalry, which can be determined genetically or as deliberate choices (Myers, Goodboy, 2010; Mikkelson, 2014). The paradoxical nature of the sibling relationship has

been confirmed in numerous typologies attempting to put sibling subsystem relationships into uniform theoretical frames (Gold, 1990; Murphy, 1992; Kristine, Morgan, 1998; Szymańska, 2016). The sibling relationship in adulthood for some people can be a valuable resource, an excellent source of friendship and support (Connidis, Davies, 1990). For others it can mean a source of conflict and rivalry (Allan, 1977; Connidis, 2007). However, it must be stressed that the research results obtained in this field are characterized by significant discrepancies.

Analysing the concept of *conflict* between siblings in adulthood, the adopted interpretation is the interactive one. In my present study, *conflict* is understood as a dispute where at least two parties are engaged. These parties think that their goals are inconsistent, the resources limited, and perceive each other as obstacles in achieving their objectives (Wilmont, Hocker, 2011). A *conflictual relationship* between siblings in adulthood has been defined as a negative relationship, characterized by failure to reach an agreement between the parties, a desire to dominate, perceived mutual contrasts, demonstrative competitive behaviours and, in some cases, even destructive ones including aggression.

Sibling conflict is mainly to be found within family relationships. It should be considered as a social conflict whose essence is its participants' conscious emotional commitment (Sztumski, 1987). Analysing the meaning of disharmony in the relationships between siblings, focus is placed on the broader social context, namely, the other family members' behaviour, and the social surrounding. That is required by the adopted assumptions of the systemic theory, which is best explains how the family functions social (McHale et al., 2006). Therefore, the present discussion on specific sibling relationships will be based on the above mentioned paradigm.

In the systemic interpretation, *family* is a system forming a certain complex reality and a set of elements in dynamic interaction where each element is determined by the others. Thus, the whole family as a community of people is affected by all its members. It is stressed that basic to the family system is the *emergency* phenomenon, meaning that the family system is more than a sum of its constituent elements. All family members together create a reciprocal relationship network. In the family system, each person has their own individuality and at the same time, so to say, carries traces of the whole system (Ryś, 2009). It was adopted in this study that interpersonal conflict is a particular interaction in which there are negative influences between its participants. This relationship may encompass all the family subsystems, but due to the subject under discussion, focus was placed on the sibling subsystem.

There may be different social conflicts between siblings, namely, age conflict (contemptuous use of the words “elder/younger brother/sister”), generation conflict (when the age difference between siblings is significant – 10 years and more), and gender con-

flict (between sisters and brothers). A reason of these conflicts or misunderstandings can also be the phenomenon of overt or hidden competition for the parents' favour. Such a conflictual relationship between siblings to a great extent keeps changing with age and depends on the family's life stage. A lot of family researchers present findings that confirm the view about a gradual reduction of the sibling conflict level. In childhood and adulthood, it is usually very high, but in adulthood it demonstrates a downward trend (Furman, Buhrmeister, 1985; Lanthier et al., 1997; Noller, 2005). This situation can be explained by changes in a child's and adolescent's needs, the possibilities of satisfying them by the parents as well as those resulting from all family member needs. And besides, adult siblings do not usually live together, are independent persons, and can decide about the frequency of their meetings.

Another factor significantly affecting sibling subsystem conflict is gender. The gender constellation in siblings has often been taken up by family researchers (Buhrmeister, 1992; Voorpostel, Blieszner, 2008), but their research findings do not give a clear picture. More consistency has been found in respect to positive sibling relationships, indicating that the relationships between same gender siblings, especially the sister-sister dyad, tend to be characterized by the highest closeness levels (Cicircelli, 1991; Lanthier et al., 1997; Voorpostel, Van der Lippe, 2007; Harwas-Napierała, 2014). Research results describing hostility between siblings are less consistent. In some researchers' opinion, the most conflict-inducing relationships are those between brothers (Cole, Kerns, 2001) whereas other findings indicate the sister-sister dyad as the most conflictual one (Voorpostel, Blieszner, 2008). Some researchers say that having a sister increases the level of life satisfaction although it is emphasized that in same gender siblings there might be tension, strong competition, and deliberate activities aimed at shaping one's own identity in contrast to the sister (McGhee, 1985).

It is interesting cognitively to refer the conflictual relationship to mental wellbeing. In operationalizing *mental wellbeing*, it has been assumed that it is an emotional attitude towards one's own life, which has resulted from getting to know it and reflecting on it. The cognitive component, constituting the emotional one, is demonstrated in self-appraisal and the appraisal of one's life as compared with accepting life's standards. A positive result stemming from these comparisons indicates that there is contentment and satisfaction with life. The *mental wellbeing* interpretation adopted in this study is both general and detailed in nature, determined by three dimensions: emotional, mental and social. Emotional wellbeing² is derived from the concept of N. M. Bradburn (1969) and

² Emotional wellbeing is understood as experiencing life satisfaction and being in a positive mental state (Karaś et al., 2014).

H. Cantril (1965). Mental wellbeing³ is understood according to C.D. Ryff's concept (1989), and social wellbeing⁴ to the theory by C.L.M. Keyes (1998) and D. Karaś et al. (2014). Research conducted from different theoretical perspectives provides evidence that close relationships with other people may not only be a correlate of human wellbeing but also its causative force. People who have close relationships with friends and/or relatives are generally happier (Myers, Diener, 1995). However, it should be stressed that close relationships are indispensable for a person to experience mental wellbeing only if they contain positive interactions. Since there is a strong correlation between the quality of interpersonal relationships and wellbeing, it is important to better understand the correlation between adult sibling relationships and their wellbeing.

The present knowledge about the research subject being considered indicates that numerous discrepancies exist in researchers' opinions on the relational quality in the adult sister dyad as well as scarce research carried out in Poland. This finding was an inspiration for seeking answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the perceived mutual relationship image of adult sisters?
2. Do age and gender constellations differentiate the relational conflict occurrences in sisters?
3. Do age and relational conflict intensity levels in the sister dyad differentiate general mental wellbeing levels?

Based on the related literature, the following research hypotheses have been elaborated:

H1: A dimension that most often describes the relationships in the adult sister dyad is warmth, yet there are also present less frequently occurring factors of conflict and rivalry.

H2: With age conflictual relationship occurrences in the examined sister dyads decrease.

H3: In the sister-sister dyads the relational conflict occurs less often than in the sister-brother dyads.

H4: Older age and high relational conflict intensity levels in the examined women decrease general mental wellbeing levels.

³ Mental wellbeing refers to satisfaction with the functioning of a human person in individual terms (e.g. in respect to integration vs. autonomy, intimacy, acceptance) (Karaś et al., 2014).

⁴ Social wellbeing concerns satisfaction with functioning in terms of the super-individual, or public dimension (Karaś et al., 2014).

Method

Participants

The study included 240 adult women, coming from the Łódź district. Due to some imprecise answers, the answers of only 199 women were taken into account. The women's ages ranged from 19 to 76 years (average of 41.94; SD = 15.71). Young adults (from 21 to 35 years of age) included 63 women (31.7%), middle-aged people (36–50 years of age) included 88 women (44.2%), and late adults (from 51 to 76 years of age) 48 women (24.1%). The women mostly lived in urban areas (n=132; 36.4%). Residence in a rural area was declared by 67 respondents (33.7%). Considering professional activity, it was found out that over half the women were active in the labour market (n=115; 57.8%), almost half them were still studying (n=49; 24.6%), and the smallest percentage included pensioners (n=35; 17.6%). All the women were raised together with siblings, towards whom they were supposed to take an attitude in the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire. When the research was conducted, 81.9% of the women (n=163) did not live together with their siblings. Analysing birth order, more than half the women were born as the first child in the family (n=107; 53.8%). Considering gender constellation in the women's siblings, it was noticed that 60.8% of them (n=121) were raised in the sister-sister dyad whereas 39.2% (n=78) grew up with a brother (sister-brother).

Procedure

The study was conducted in Poland, in the Łódź district in 2014–2015. The participants were recruited via the snow-ball method. The majority of the participants fit into the chosen criteria, and belonged to the agreed age groups. The persons were informed about the aim of the study and the intention to use the results only for scientific purposes. Participation was anonymous and voluntary. Completing the test sets took the respondents about 30 minutes and was done free of charge.

Research instruments

To collect empirical data, the test procedure was applied as the basic diagnostic method. In the study, two research instruments and a questionnaire for collecting demographic data and the ones referring to the issues related with having siblings were applied.

Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (ASRQ) by C. Stocker et al. (1997) in the adaptation by K. Wałęcka-Matyja (2014) was used to measure relationships between siblings in adulthood. It is a self-reporting instrument, with which the examined person evaluates their behaviours and feelings towards their adult siblings as well as their siblings' perceptions – of the behaviours and feelings toward the respondents. ASRQ in-

cludes 81 items, which make up three main composite factors of sibling relationships: *Warmth*, *Conflict* and *Rivalry*.

Conflict describes relationships characterized by lack of understanding between siblings, willingness to dominate, noticing differences and competitive behaviours. The scales making up the Conflict factor are: Opposition, Domination, Quarrel, and Competition (Cronbach's α .92). The dimension of *Warmth* covers a relationship characterized by acceptance, closeness between siblings, who acknowledge their similarities, admire each other, have knowledge about each other, and support each other, both emotionally and instrumentally (Cronbach's α .97). *Rivalry* refers to the degree in which siblings feel treated fairly or unfairly by their parents (Cronbach's α .87).

All the ASRQ items (except rivalry) are assessed on the Likert's scale, from "Hardly Anything" (1 point) to "Extremely Much" (5 points). Items measuring the rivalry level in siblings were assessed on a scale from zero to two points. The psychometric properties of ASRQ are good and make carrying out research possible (Cronbach's α .87-.97) (Stocker et al., 1997; Walęcka-Matyja, 2014).

The Mental Health Continuum-Short Form MHC-SF scale by C.L.M. Keyes (2008) adapted by D. Karaś, J., Ciecuch, and C.L.M. Keyes (2014) was used to determine general mental wellbeing. The MHC questionnaire comprises 14 items considered as the most characteristic for defining an individual's mental wellbeing. Three items represent emotional wellbeing and are derived from N.M. Bradburn's (1969) and H. Cantril's (1965) concept. Six items represent mental wellbeing as interpreted by C.D. Ryff (1989), and five items social wellbeing referring to C.L.M. Keyes' theory (1998). Respondents declare how often they experience particular mental health symptoms (how often in the last month: *never, once or twice, more or less once a week, 2-3 times a week, almost every day, every day*). The general score in the MHC-SF scale is the sum of the individual item scores. It is also possible to calculate the three wellbeing indicators. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability for the whole scale is .91 and for the three MHC-SF subscales from .82 to .87. Normal control research was conducted on 2115 adult people (Karaś et al., 2014).

Results

In the statistical analysis, the repeated measures ANOVA and regression analysis were applied and conducted using SPSS 22 software.

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the interval variables.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics distribution.*

Examined group	Sisters having adult siblings N=199			
	M	SD	Min.	Max.
Sibling relationship dimensions				
Warmth	143.32	38.22	52.0	228.0
Rivalry	4.64	6.13	.0	24.0
Conflict	41.55	13.52	23.0	81.0
Conflict dimensions				
Quarrel	11.46	3.82	5	22
Opposition	10.53	4.34	6	27
Competition	10.18	4.27	6	23
Domination	9.37	4.00	6	25

Source: own work.

The quality of adult sibling relationships according to the examined women

To find an answer to the first research question, due to the large scores span on the relationship quality scales, these scores were recalculated as the mean score values obtained for appropriate questionnaire items. The items included in the rivalry dimension were recoded – instead of the scoring recommended in the key 0–1–2, a scoring 1–3–5 was applied.

Table 2 presents the mean values of the recalculated scores on the relationship quality scales.

Table 2. *Recalculated result values on relationship quality scales.*

Relationship quality	M	SD
Warmth	3.12	0.83
Rivalry	1.74	1.01
Conflict	1.81	0.59

Source: own work.

Based on the repeated ANOVA measures, it has been found that between the mean values of the points on the relationship quality scales there were statistically significant

differences $F(1.67; 331.42)=150.72$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.43$. Pairwise comparisons with the Bonferroni correction allow for the statement that the results in the Warmth dimension were significantly statistically higher than in the Rivalry ($p<0.001$) and Conflict dimensions ($p<0.001$). No statistically significant difference was found between the Rivalry and Conflict dimension scores. The obtained results confirm hypothesis 1.

Age and gender constellation vs. conflict occurrences in sisters' relationships with their adult siblings

In order to provide an answer to the second research question, a regression analysis was carried out, in which the person's ages, their sibling gender constellation (sister-sister or sister-brother) and the interaction between them were analysed as predictors. The level of conflict and conflict dimensions namely, quarrel, opposition, competition and domination, were analysed in separate models.

Table 3 presents the obtained regression coefficients together with their statistical significance.

Table 3. *Results of regression analysis.*

Dependent variables	Age		Gender constellation		Age x gender constellation	
	Beta	p	Beta	p	Beta	p
Conflict	-0.24**	0.001	0.04	0.525	-2.25*	0.026
Opposition	-0.27***	0.001	0.08	0.224	-0.18*	0.012
Quarrel	-0.26***	0.001	0.05	0.488	-0.16*	0.025
Domination	-0.18*	0.012	0.02	0.818	-0.15*	0.045
Competition	-0.08	0.260	-0.04	0.965	-0.05	0.517

Source: own work.

Statistically significant correlations were discovered between the examined persons' ages and the of opposition, quarrel and domination conflict intensity levels. The higher the age the lower the conflict level. The obtained results are consistent with hypothesis H2. The persons' ages explained 3.9% of the conflict level variance, 4.9% of the opposition intensity variance, 4.8% of the quarrel intensity variance and 2.1% of the domination intensity variance. But no statistically significant correlation was found between age and competition intensity.

No statistically significant main effects of gender constellation in siblings were discovered; therefore, we obtained no results to confirm hypothesis H3.

On the other hand, statistically significant interaction effects were noticed between the persons' ages and their sibling gender constellations in respect to conflict, opposition intensity, quarrel intensity and domination intensity. The interaction effects explained

2.4% of the conflict level variance, 3.0% opposition intensity variance, 2.3% quarrel intensity variance, and 2.0% domination intensity variance.

Table 4 presents the regression analysis results conducted in the group having a sister and in the group having a brother, in which the correlations between age and conflict and the intensity levels of opposition, quarrel and domination were analysed.

Table 4. Results of regression analysis conducted in the group of people who had a sister and in the group of people who had a brother.

Dependent variables	sister-sister		sister-brother	
	Beta	p	Beta	p
Conflict	-0.08	0.361	-0.36**	0.001
Opposition	-0.10	0.278	-0.37**	0.001
Quarrel	-0.10	0.268	-0.42***	0.001
Domination	-0.04	0.661	-0.29*	0.010

Source: own work.

It has been found that statistically significant negative correlations between age and conflict level, opposition, quarrel and domination intensities occurred exclusively in the group of people who had a brother. Age in this group explained 13.3% of the conflict level variance, 13.8% opposition intensity variance, 18.0% quarrel intensity variance, and 8.4% domination intensity variance.

Age and sibling relational conflict intensity vs. general wellbeing experience

The age and the level of sibling relational conflict were also examined as general mental wellbeing predictors. The regression coefficients are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Analysis of correlations between mental wellbeing and age and sibling relational conflict level for respondents.

Predictors	General wellbeing	
	Beta	p
Age	-0.08	0.272
Conflict	-0.09	0.211

Source: own work.

No statistically significant correlations were discovered; therefore, there are no results to confirm hypothesis H4.

Discussion

The aim in my article was to answer the question about sibling relationship quality as perceived by adult sisters and to analyse one of the components in this relationship, the Conflict factor. It was assumed that the sibling relationships in early, middle and late adulthood would be characterized in the greatest degree by ambivalence, with Warmth prevailing and with Conflict and Rivalry as a smaller presence (Myers, Goodboy, 2010; Mikkelsen, 2014). My research has confirmed these expectations. The result depicts the multidimensionality of adult sibling relationships, clearly indicating that apart from the most frequently occurring Warmth dimension, these relationships also contain conflict and rivalry.

Another aim of my study was to verify the age and gender constellation variables in siblings for the experience of relational conflict intensity. The expectations proved by some earlier empirical findings have been confirmed only to a certain extent. It appeared that the variable *age* played an important part in shaping the examined sisters' relationships with siblings, whereas the variable *sibling gender constellation* did not. In-depth reflections constituted grounds for formulating a conclusion that with age, conflicts between the examined women and their siblings were scarcer with more kindness and support being shown. It can be presumed that the most conspicuous relational conflict concerned sibling relationships fostered by women in early adulthood in comparison with those in middle and late adulthood. The results are congruent with other researchers' findings (Furman, Buhrmeister, 1985; Lanthier et al., 1997; Noller, 2005). Interpreting the above – mentioned fact, it shall be remembered that although the examined sisters lived separately, the sibling relationships perceived by them were conflictual. In the related literature there is a view that negative adult sibling relationships often result from unresolved disputes originating from earlier developmental periods, which could contribute to the research results. Moreover, this period is characterized by relationships with a high intensity degree (Cicirelli, 1991; Buhrmester, 1992). However, there was no proof that conflictual relationships were more frequent in the sister-sister dyads than in the sister-brother dyads. The results obtained in this respect have not confirmed hypothesis three. It was found that statistically significant negative correlations between age and multidimensional conflict levels occurred exclusively in the group of sisters who had brothers.

The last research question attempted to demonstrate that the *age* and *high relational conflict intensity* variables with siblings differentiated the sister groups in terms of experiencing general wellbeing. The empirical findings in the study show that there were no statistically significant correlations that would confirm hypothesis four. Interpreting the obtained results, we must refer to the sisters' general characteristics in their relationships with siblings, which describes them mainly in the warmth categories and therefore understood as positive in nature. Thus, a conclusion can be drawn about the

relatively low intensity of conflict, which is not significant for experiencing lower general wellbeing levels, as well as the examined sisters' sufficient social competencies in respect to solving conflicts. It is worth emphasizing that the general wellbeing level is also determined by many other factors – genetic, subjective and situational, – whose verification goes outside the scope of this study (Karaś et al., 2014).

Summing up, research on sibling subsystems and developing knowledge in this field are part of the research conducted on a person's functions throughout the whole course of life. Undoubtedly, psychological knowledge in this field needs permanent updating and clarifying. Due to the fact that a human life lasts longer and longer, it is worth exploring its spheres that have been overlooked so far and looking for factors that may improve its quality.

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GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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Maximum article length is to be 20 typed pages (including references, footnotes, figures and figures captions, and tables as well as their caption). References should not exceed six typed pages. Typescripts should be Times New Roman and standard font size 12, double-spaced throughout, with 1.5-4 cm margins left and right. The e-mailed copy should be 1800 ASCII characters per computer page.

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