

Level of Assertiveness of Pupils From Institutional Forms of Foster Care

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Abstract: Assertiveness is one of the factors that determine human functioning in many areas. The aim of the research was an attempt to determine the level of assertiveness of charges of institutional forms of foster care. The study used the “Me and others” questionnaire. The data analysis showed that the charges of institutional forms of foster care are characterized by a low and medium level of assertiveness. There were also no differences, taking into account the sex of the surveyed charges.

Key words: empathy, pupils, institutional foster care

1. Introduction: Assertiveness- Shaping A Constructive Self-Image

One of the first to try to describe the phenomenon of assertiveness, and at the same time initiate research on assertiveness, was Salter (1949). In his book *Conditioned Reflex Therapy*, he put forward a theory that says that people develop “stimulating” and “inhibiting” personalities based on experiences conditioned in social situations. The concept of assertiveness, which was understood as a personality trait, was also adopted by Cattell (1965). On the basis of the conducted analyzes, he defined human characteristics and classified them into two categories: temperamental traits and abilities. Cattell distinguished the H factor called “parmia” (parasympathetic resilience), colloquially referred to as boldness, entrepreneurship, and the “threcita” factor, which stands for shyness (Hall & Lindsay, 2006). In addition, Cattell (1965) based his research on three data sources: documentation of an individual’s life that takes into account assessments of behavior made by others, self-description of behavior, and observation of behavior. According to the presented concepts, assertiveness is a general, specific tendency to react, completely or relatively independent of the situation (Rich & Schroeder, 1976). The approach to the phenomenon of assertiveness, most widely described in the literature on the subject, comes from behaviorism. It should be noted, however, that among the various theoretical approaches, it is difficult to distinguish between those that have a behavioral character and those that treat assertiveness as a skill, i.e., the readiness to undertake a specific behavior adapted to the situation (Tomaszewski, 1978). On the other hand, Lindenfield (1996) defines assertiveness as a behavior that allows you to specifically and decisively communicate your own needs and feelings of other people, so as not to violate their own rights. Rimma, Mastersa (1979) define assertiveness as interpersonal behavior in which we deal with the direct expression of thoughts and feelings in a way that will be socially acceptable.

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2. The Importance of Assertiveness for Proper Human Functioning

Wolpe and Lazarus (1966) used assertiveness mainly in the therapy of people for whom fear made it impossible to maintain self-control and led to social maladjustment. Assertiveness, according to this concept, served to overcome neurotic anxiety habits in a social situation. It intensifies reactions such as anger, leading to the blocking of anxiety. On the other hand, if assertive behavior is presented in an appropriate way, its positive consequences usually emerge, including: reducing anxiety and gaining dominance and control in the social situation. Moreover, the positive consequences of assertive behavior are a kind of reward and, as a result, strengthen the individual's tendency to continue to be assertive. On the other hand, the lack of assertiveness, characteristic of the so-called "inhibited personality", leads to the accumulation of anxiety reactions and the stressful search for confirmation that the behavior patterns adopted by the individual are correct, which in turn causes somatic symptoms and pathological changes. Mika (1982) assumes the defensive role of assertive behavior in emergency situations. According to the author, the purpose of assertive behavior is to oppose manipulation by other people. If an individual knows that he is being manipulated and is aware of the fact that he is unable to oppose these manipulations, then instead of assertive behavior, he presents non-assertive behavior, as a result of which he feels deeply dissatisfied. Fernsterheim and Baer (1975) describe the consequences of a lack of assertiveness in a similar way. They believe that human difficulties in presenting assertive behavior lead to the development of resentment, fear and self-contempt for the lack of ability to cope with the demands of the environment. Such feelings turn into an attitude of hostility towards others and a tendency to depreciate them in order to improve self-esteem. As a consequence, the individual behaves in an assertive manner, getting into conflicts with the social environment, and over time he develops neurotic personality disorders. The defensive nature of assertive behavior is adopted by Gaś (1984), although his understanding of the assertiveness function is broader than in previous approaches. In the author's concept, assertive behavior occurs in response to the threat of losing certain human values. Undoubtedly, the author's concept has enriched the approach to the role of assertiveness with a very important element. Assertiveness ceased to be manifested only in difficult situations. It began to be an active activity, also presented in social situations that did not threaten an individual. Moreover, Gaś (1984), although indirectly, extends the consequences of a lack of assertiveness to other than social situations. In his opinion, assertiveness is supposed to give people a sense of security, freedom and identity. As in Gasio's concept, Król-Fijewska's (1992) approach is much broader than the first approaches to the problem of the role of assertiveness. According to the author, assertiveness determines the success of a person in interpersonal relations and gives him self-respect and a sense of his own dignity. According to the concept of Sęk (1988), assertiveness is supposed to serve a person in achieving the intended individual and social goals, and performing significant social tasks. Thanks to assertive behavior, the individual is to not only defend the image of himself, but also confirm his own value and take care of his development.

3. Own Research

This article is part of a larger research project led by the author. The aim of the empirical research is an attempt to define the assertiveness of juveniles in institutional forms of foster care. In this way, the specific aim of the research entitles us to formulate the research problem contained in the question: what is the level of assertiveness of charges of institutional forms of foster care? The formulated question is of a diagnostic nature,

therefore, in line with the principles of research methodology, it does not require any working hypotheses. In order to obtain an answer to the research problem posed, the method of diagnostic survey with the use of the questionnaire technique was used. The “Me and others” questionnaire was used to diagnose the general level of assertiveness — a scale for testing assertive behavior. The questionnaire consists of 17 statements, to which the respondent responds by highlighting one of five possible answers: “completely untrue”, “rather false”, “partially untrue, partially true”, “rather true”, “completely true”, scored on a scale of 1 to 5 for each inventory statement. It was assumed that “the results in the 5–6 range mean a medium level of assertiveness, the results in the 7–10 sten range are considered a high level of assertiveness, and the results in the 1–4 sten range indicate a low level of assertiveness” (Brzeziński, 1980, p. 175). 56 charges from four institutional foster care institutions participated in the study. In total, 30 girls (53.6% of the respondents) and 26 boys (46.4% of the respondents) were examined. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous, with the identification of age, sex, contacts with parents, period of stay in the facility and the number of siblings. The most numerous group of respondents were people aged 15 (21.4% of respondents) and 16 years of age (28.6% of respondents). The numerical data contained in the table indicate the division of the study group by age.

Table 1 Age of the Respondents

Age	N	%
12	1	1.8
13	3	5.4
14	10	17.9
15	12	21.4
16	16	28.6
17	4	7.1
18	9	16.1
19	1	1.8
altogether	56	100.0

Another criterion for the division of the surveyed group of respondents was the number of siblings. Due to this division, 14.3% (8 respondents) selected the answer that they did not have siblings, (41.1%) (23 people) 1–2 siblings, 3–4 siblings indicated 44.6% (25 respondents). Therefore, when analyzing the results, it can be concluded that most of the respondents have siblings. The results of this division are presented in the Table 2 below.

Table 2 Number of Siblings Owned by the Surveyed Group of Respondents

Number of siblings	N	%
I do not have siblings	8	14.3
1–2 siblings	23	41.1
3–4 siblings	25	44.6
altogether	56	100.0

When analyzing the duration of the respondents' stay in facilities, it can be concluded that the largest group of respondents in terms of stay in the facility are people staying in the facility for over 5 years 30.4% (17 respondents), and 28.6% (16 respondents) up to 1 year. Then, 2–3 years 25.0% (14 respondents), more than 1 year 8.9% (5 respondents). The smallest percentage of respondents was occupied by the respondents staying in the

facility for 4 to 5 years, 7.1% (4 respondents). The table below summarizes the duration of the respondents' stay in the care and educational institution.

Table 3 Duration of Stay in the Facility of the Surveyed Group of Respondents

Time of visit	N	%
up to 1 year	16	28.6
over 1 year	5	8.9
2–3 years	14	25.0
4–5 years	4	7.1
over 5 years	17	30.4
altogether	56	100.0

The next criterion that could be used to divide the participants of the study were contacts with their parents. When analyzing the contacts with the mother, the surveyed respondents answered that in 32.1% these contacts are very frequent (18 respondents), 23.2% often contacted their mother (13 respondents), rarely and never responded in the amount of 12.5% each (7 respondents each), these answers were the least frequently selected. The last answer was very rare contacts with the mother and the result was classified at the level of 8.9% (5 respondents). Summing up, it should be stated that most of the respondents kept in touch with the mother (very often and often 55.3%), the smaller half replied that they had no contact with their mother or were rare. The table below shows the number and percentage of the respondents broken down by the frequency of contact with the mother.

Table 4 Contacts With the Mother of the Surveyed Group of Respondents

Contacts with the mother	N	%
very often	18	32.1
often	13	23.2
very rarely	5	8.9
rarely	7	12.5
never	7	12.5
No data	6	10.7
altogether	56	100.0

When analyzing the respondents' contacts with the father, it can be stated that they were not as frequent as compared to the contacts with the mother. The respondents most often indicated that they contact their father very often 19.6% (11 respondents). 8.9% (5 respondents) admitted frequent contact with the father, while the group that had never contacted the father turned out to be similar in terms of number 14.3% (8 respondents). Another answer was the answer rarely 5.4% (3 respondents), 1 person marked the answer very rarely. The cited data indicate that there were more contacts with the mother in terms of number than with the father.

Table 5 Contacts With the Father of the Surveyed Group of Respondents

Contacts with the father	N	%
very often	11	19.6
often	5	8.9
very rarely	1	1.8
rarely	3	5.4
never	8	14.3
No data	28	50.0
altogether	56	100.0

When analyzing the entire group of respondents, the highest percentage of the studied group obtained an average level of assertiveness of 46.4% (26 respondents). The second most numerous result was assertiveness at a low level of 33.9% (19 respondents). The last one in terms of the number of people was the result of assertiveness at a high level of 19.6% (11 respondents). Summarizing the analyzed results, it can be concluded that the level of assertiveness of the studied group was average. The group included people characterized by a high level of assertiveness, but also 1/3 of the studied group achieved a low level of assertiveness.

Table 6 The Level of Empathy of the Surveyed Pupils

Assertiveness level	N	%
Low level of assertiveness	19	33.9
Medium level of assertiveness	26	46.4
High level of assertiveness	11	19.6
altogether	56	100.0

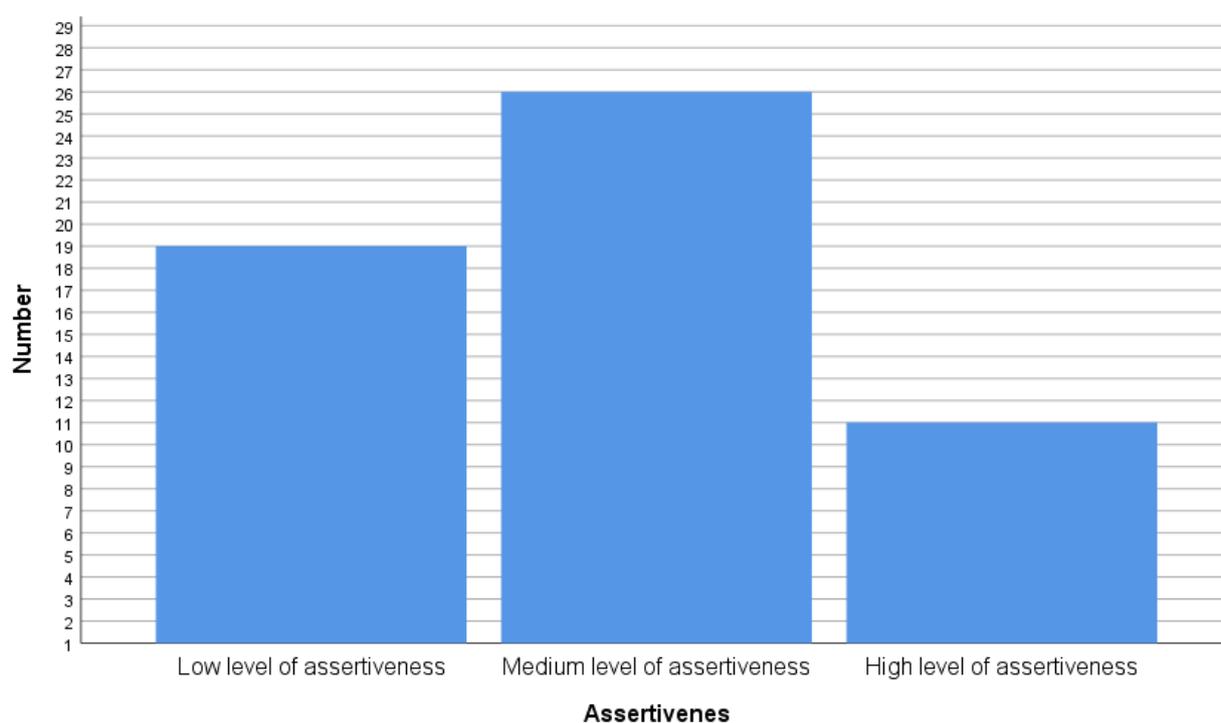


Figure 1 The Level of Assertiveness of the Surveyed Pupils

Table 7 The Level of Assertiveness of the Respondents, Taking Into Account Gender

Assertiveness level	Sex		altogether
	Woman	Man	
Low level of assertiveness	12	7	19
Medium level of assertiveness	13	13	26
High level of assertiveness	5	6	11
altogether	30	26	56

When analyzing the results of the research on the level of empathy of the surveyed men and women, it can be noticed that the distribution of results in comparable groups is similar. However, it can be concluded that the results obtained by women in terms of the average level of assertiveness achieved the same result. The discussed research results in the field of assertiveness of the surveyed women and men are presented in Figure 2.

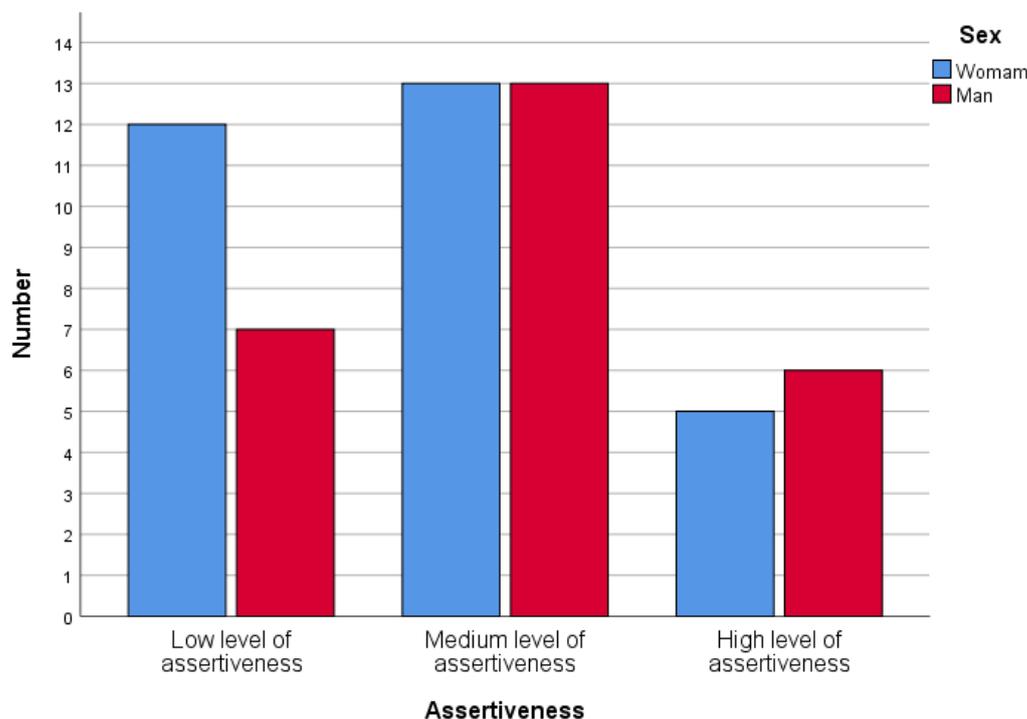


Figure2 TheLevel Of Assertiveness Of The Respondents, Taking Into Account Gender

4. Summary

The deficit of assertiveness may lead to the formation of defensive and impulsive aggression, and thus - negative self-esteem and personality disorders (Fensterheim, Baer, 1975). On the other hand, assertive behavior not only has a positive effect on functioning in interpersonal relationships, but also increases self-respect. When explaining the phenomenon of assertiveness more broadly, it should be emphasized that assertive behavior consists of many elements. The condition of assertive behavior is not only the acquisition of specific skills, which, by the way, relate to specific situations, but also adequate knowledge about interpersonal relationships, as well as knowledge of the values on which they are based. Only the element of knowledge transforms a social skill into a social competence. Moreover, social competences and skills relate to a specific situational context. The functioning of a person in interpersonal relationships should therefore be considered taking into account situational and motivational factors, the person's ability to differentiate between situations and to adapt their behavior to the internal goals and requirements of the situation.

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