

The role of activity, emotional reactivity and emotional intelligence in assertiveness

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Abstract

Aim. The aim of the study was to analyze how emotional intelligence and temperamental traits – emotional reactivity and activity – are related to the assertiveness.

Method. The study used the Social Competence Questionnaire (SCQ), Formal Characteristics of Behavior – Temperament Questionnaire (FCB-TQ(R)) and the Popular Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (PEIQ). Data was collected from a sample of 204 people including 115 males and 89 females.

Results. Results showed that assertiveness is correlated with activity, emotional reactivity, understanding emotions, acceptance of emotions and emotional control. Regression analysis showed that emotional acceptance, emotional reactivity and activity explain 36% of assertiveness in the studied sample.

assertiveness; emotional intelligence; temperament

MEANING AND DEFINITIONS OF ASSERTIVENESS

The subject of assertiveness is an important issue from the point of view of psychology and human functioning in the everyday social world. It is often equated with the ability to say “no” under situations when one’s interests are not being considered, while the framework for assertive behavior is much broader. Assertiveness includes not only the ability to refuse requests addressed to an individual, but also the ability to express one’s opinion (even if it is in opposition to the unanimity of the group), and to formulate requests and expectations [1]. According to Król-Fijewska [2], assertiveness is connected with exercising one’s rights in a “direct, firm and honest manner, while respecting the feelings, attitudes,

wishes, opinions and rights of another person” (p. 9). Richard S. Lazarus [3] states that assertiveness is made up of individual abilities, such as the ability to initiate, sustain and end a conversation, the ability to refuse, to express a positive or negative attitude to a given situation. Communication skills, freedom in expressing one’s own views, defending one’s own rights, accepting criticism from others, realizing one’s own goals without violating the boundaries of other people, all play an important role in assertiveness. These definitions suggest that assertiveness may be better conceptualized as a group of skills rather than one particular skill.

Assertiveness within a social competences model

Social competence can be conceptualised as a developmental construct [4] where a person learns, from childhood, which behaviours are

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more suitable for a given social context through explicit training and by observing others interacting, progressively leading to the experience of more complex interactions. Competences that are important in situations requiring assertiveness are a component of the model of social competences by Matczak [5]. The author defines assertiveness as “complex skills conditioning the effectiveness of coping with a specific type of social situation, acquired by an individual in the course of social training” (p. 7). In this model, social competences include situations of social exposure, situations that require assertiveness and intimacy. Matczak [5, pp. 5-6] notes that “the perfect balance between meeting one’s own needs and social expectations and requirements is not always possible or desirable from an adaptive point of view”. Assertive behavior not only depends on having appropriate competences, but also requires knowledge of the principles governing social life in a particular culture (e.g., norms, rules, [6]) and the ability to predict the consequences that result from certain behaviors [7]. Factors that predispose an individual to show assertiveness include: knowledge of appropriate norms and rules of conduct; behavioral, specific skills of self-expression and self-defence, and situational cognitive assessment of a given situation and one’s own reaction to this situation, including anticipating the consequences of one’s own behavior in the personal and social sphere [8]. To consider a behaviour as assertive it needs to be judged as effective towards one’s goals, desired by the individual and socially accepted [9]. According to Śliwak [10] assertive behavior occurs if in contacts with other people, an individual does not allow to be violated or manipulated. However, defending one’s rights must be done in a socially approved way, without violating the welfare of other people. Assertive behavior is not aggressive and must be socially accepted. When defending own rights, individual must not violate the rights of another person. A feature of assertive behavior should also be openness in expressing own beliefs about a given matter when another person violates individual’s rights.

Furthermore, Ames, Lee and Wazlawek [11] oppose assertive behavior to accommodating behavior and navigate the notion of ‘too much’ or ‘too little’ assertiveness, setting the most ef-

fective responses in this domain as a balancing act between accommodation and assertiveness. This judgement is usually made by the people involved and Ames et al. [10] explicitly take a folk psychology approach, where peoples’ commonsensical views of effective responses to situations where assertiveness is needed (e.g., potential conflict of interests) lies on a spectrum, from avoidant and passive, to competitive and even aggressive. *Interpersonal assertiveness* is, therefore, defined by the authors as ‘the degree to which people speak out and stand up for their own interests when they are not perfectly aligned with others’ (p. 2).

Correlates of assertiveness

Previous studies have shown a relationship between assertiveness and dealing with difficult situations of students [12], with altruism and empathy among nursing students [13], between social competences (including assertiveness) and emotional intelligence [14]. Many publications also analyzed the effectiveness of interpersonal training in shaping self-insight and building personal resources related to assertiveness [1,7,15]. Tadorowski’s [16] study on professionally active adults showed that assertiveness correlates negatively with psychopathy – people scoring higher in psychopathy tend to be less assertive. Important correlate of assertiveness seems to be self-esteem – it has been shown by Romanowska-Tołoczko [17] that the tendency to demonstrate assertive behavior increases with the level of self-esteem and sense of competence in cooperation with others. As states Bańka [18] another factor related to assertiveness is self-efficacy, which is the belief that an individual can cope in a various situations; it is a generalized belief in self resources [19]. This what seems also relevant in explaining assertive behavior are other personality traits, which seems important from point of social functioning. The higher the intensity of agreeableness towards other people, the higher the intensity of assertive behavior in the surveyed group of teachers, sense of coherence (a generalized and lasting way of viewing the world and one’s life in it) correlated positively with assertiveness and promoted self-disclosure [20].

Temperament

The Regulatory Theory of Temperament (RTT) was developed by Strelau [21] and further elaborated [22]. This theory identifies two (out of seven) temperamental traits – emotional reactivity and activity – which potentially influence assertive behavior.

Emotional reactivity is a tendency to an intense reaction to emotional stimuli, manifested in high sensitivity and low emotional resistance. A high level of emotional reactivity is, therefore, distinguished by a disproportionately intense response to a stimulus [23]. Expectedly, individuals with higher emotional reactivity tend to perceive a greater number of situations as stressful [24] and are less likely to engage in social interactions [25]. High emotional reactivity is indicative of a heightened susceptibility to intense emotions, increased excitability, and poorer functioning under stressful conditions—attributes associated with lower emotional resistance [26]. Perhaps this might partially explain findings that emotional reactivity may lead to feelings of anxiety and neuroticism [21, 23]. As researches point to – temperament traits are foundation to shape personality traits – f.e. neuroticism (27). Indeed, emotional reactivity is closely linked to the perception of emotional states, particularly those of a negative valence [28]. Emotional reactivity is mostly related to negative emotions such as anxiety [29, 22] and social anxiety [30]. As Lerner, Li, Valdesolo and Kassam [31] point to internal temperamental and personality conditions also influence the decisions a person makes. They determine current emotions (felt at time of decision) and lead to conscious/nonconscious evaluation of current situation. What is worth mentioning is fact, that “dispositionally fearful people made pessimistic judgments of future events” (p. 7). Important factor in decision processing is stimulus (the processing of which is determined by temperamental features). In situations where an individual is overstimulated, he or she will make decisions to avoid overstimulation [32].

Emotional reactivity is also a moderator of the relationship between perceived social support and subjective sense of quality of life [33], suggesting that people with higher emotional reactivity feel higher satisfaction with life in a situ-

ation of high support than people with lower emotional reactivity.

While higher emotional reactivity may manifest as lower endurance and increased emotional and sensory sensitivity, lower levels of emotional reactivity may translate in endurance to long-term and strong stimulation. In daily life, this may translate, for example, into a higher ability to remain calmer during prototypical anxiety-provoking situations. Lower level of emotional reactivity is related to higher level of extraversion [22].

The second temperamental trait analyzed (in terms of the Regulatory Theory of Temperament) is activity, which is associated with engaging in behaviors that are characterized by a high stimulating value [21]. High activity is accompanied by a high threshold of emotional arousal, which enables such individuals to engage and persevere in many activities. In addition, it is worth emphasizing that, among other factors, high activity contributes to the structure of the so-called “Resistant Type” [34]. Other types of temperament detailed by authors are “Understimulated, Overstimulated and Non – resistant”. According to Brzezińska, Piotrowski, Garbarek – Sawicka, Karowska and Muszyńska [35], people who are temperamentally predisposed to deal with situations of high stimulating value (or who seek these situations themselves) feel a lower level of anxiety and are more willing to undertake commitments with which they identify themselves.

It is worth emphasizing that high activity is associated with the high-order factor – extraversion included in the Five Factor Model of personality, which characterises people along a number of facets such as warmth, gregariousness, assertiveness, activity level, engagement seeking and positive emotions [36]. Furthermore, it correlates negatively with severity of neuroticism, yet another higher-order factor of personality [22]. This means that activity is a factor contributing to the active attitude of an individual in society and seems to be a factor related to assertiveness. As indicated by Fensterheim and Baer [37], an assertive person tends to appropriately communicate in an authentic, honest, and open manner. Active approach to life refers to setting goals and reaching them, instead of passively waiting for things to happen. Re-

search has shown that activity negatively correlates with the intensity of an individual's anxiety and the problems these experience in engaging in areas important for the development of identity [35]; positively with the need for cognition and emotional intelligence [38]. The need for cognition plays a special role in processes motivational, because it is responsible for proactive searching for and engaging in intellectual activities that develop the individual – which in turn may lead to increase assertiveness level, especially in gaining knowledge related to what assertive behavior is.

Emotional intelligence and assertiveness

Several Emotional Intelligence (EI) theorists [e.g. 39, 40, 41] pose that people have varying degrees of ability when it comes to recognizing, processing and using emotions. When people engage in behaviours such as paying attention to and valuing feelings, or being clear about their meaning and expressing them in an adequate manner, they display emotionally intelligent behaviour. It has been shown that such behaviours increase efficacy in dealing with daily demands and correlate positively with mental health [42, 43]. Ever since the term was coined, distinct models of emotional intelligence have been developed and, as stated by Fernandez-Berrocal and Extremera [44] all “*approaches try to discover the emotional components that underlie emotionally intelligent people and the mechanisms and processes that set off the use of these abilities in our everyday life*” (p. 8). Proponents of different models have been developing distinct measures, typically divided into, at least, two categories – 1) measures of EI via ability tests [e.g., 41] where participants complete tasks and are scored based on performance and 2) self-report measures where participants typically rate their level of perceived ability when responding to Likert-scale items expressing such domains. It is generally accepted that the former measuring method assesses abilities within theoretical (often imagined) scenarios, while the latter assesses self-perceptions regarding one's abilities, with differentiation between the two approaches being supported by evidence of weak correlations between them [45].

In fact, Mikolajczak [45] addresses directly three domains claimed to be important in explaining emotional intelligence skills – knowledge, abilities and dispositions. For example, for assertive behaviour to take place, people may need to have relevant knowledge (knowing their emotional experiences), have an ability to implement it (able to apply that knowledge to the situation) and a disposition to do so (a tendency to use those abilities to generate a suitable response). Additionally, emotionally intelligent behavior is judged against a specific cultural backdrop, since what is adaptive behavior in one culture, may not be in another [46]. Cross-cultural differences are relevant when it comes to assertive behavior. For example, collectivist Asian cultures and individualistic Western cultures vary in the degree and how distinct they reward assertive or conforming behaviors [47].

As emphasized by Inglot-Kulas [48] “assertiveness is the ability to communicate one's own needs, expectations and possibilities” (p. 124). Assertive behavior is characterized by open expression of experienced emotions, communicating them and using one's subjective truth to do so [2]. Assertive behaviors also manifest themselves in interpersonal communication, openness to others, and an accepting and empathetic attitude. As McDonald and Messinger [49, p. 333] point to, “empathy can be defined as the ability to feel or imagine another person's emotional experience. The ability to empathize is an important part of social and emotional development, affecting an individual's behavior toward others and the quality of social relationships”. Acceptance of emotions refers to a non-judgmental approach to experienced emotions [50]. It is worth emphasizing that often, non-assertive behaviors are the result of dysregulated emotional states, which can have others as an object (e.g. a person with whom it is difficult to be assertive). According to Gromnicka [15], assertive behavior may be accompanied by elevated emotional arousal in certain emotionally charged contexts, such as violation of personal boundaries. These physiological responses may be seen as adaptive towards the situation (violation of one's boundaries), while leading to non-adaptive behavioral expressions (e.g., aggressive behavior). Elevated emotional arousal, if not regulated, can lead to behavior deemed as non-assertive (e.g. ag-

gression) and social sanctions [51]. On the other hand, situational demands might, sometimes, require people to fight for their rights in ways which are culturally sanctioned. These are examples which illustrate the complex nature of assertive behavior and the difficulties of assessing certain instances as emotionally intelligent. Another important question is how much attention one should pay to emotions. According to Gohm and Clore [52], the type of tasks one must perform can be an indicator. In social tasks such as the ones involved in assertiveness (e.g. negotiating, or defending one's own boundaries), it may be very important to have knowledge about what one wants or not, as well as full access to feelings which will inform decision-making in that situation. On another hand, some emergency situations require a suspension of attention to certain emotional experiences (e.g., fear) in order to increase the chances of a successful outcome. Examples of this are the performance required of soldiers during a war, people witnessing an accident and need to be regulated enough to be able call for immediate help, or athletes who need to focus on the task (scoring a penalty) as opposed to focusing too much on their emotional experiences (e.g., anxiety).

Based on the analysis of the literature, the following research problem was posed:

1. What is the relationship between temperamental traits (emotional reactivity and activity), emotional intelligence and social competences in situations requiring assertiveness?
2. Do temperamental traits (emotional reactivity and activity) and emotional intelligence predict competences in situations requiring assertiveness?

According to research question, we state the hypotheses:

1. Emotional reactivity is negatively correlated with level of social competences in situations requiring assertiveness.
2. Activity and emotional intelligence is positively correlated with social competences in situations requiring assertiveness.
3. Emotional reactivity is negative predictor, activity and emotional intelligence are positive predictors of social competences in situations requiring assertiveness.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

204 adults participated in the study (age $M = 35$; $SD = 11.6$) with ages ranging from 19 to 65. When it comes to sex, 56.4% were male. The respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, specifically that participation was free of charge and that they could resign from participating at any stage. Most of the respondents were obtained using a snowball method [53]. Other participants were recruited via advertisement in social media about the research project.

MEASURES

The Popular Questionnaire of Emotional Intelligence (PQEI) is a self-report enabling the measurement of self-perceived emotional intelligence based on the original Salovey and Mayer model [41, 54], as well as its components, i.e. acceptance of emotions, empathy, understanding emotions and emotional control. The tool consists of 94 items, and respondents answer them using a 5-point Likert scale [55]. The tool allows to calculate the overall score as well as 4 subscales of emotional intelligence. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) in this study were as follows: .798 for *Acceptance of emotions* scale; .862 for *Empathy* scale; .767 for *Emotional control* scale and .760 for *Understanding emotions* scale. This questionnaire can be used with people as young as 14 years old. It was developed and tested in a sample from the general population in Poland, which makes it suitable for the current study. Norms are available for students and adults. Exemplary items: "I often can not describe what I feel; When I feel angry, I express it without difficulty".

The Social Competences Questionnaire (SCQ) enables the measurement of social competences related to situations requiring assertiveness, social exposure, and intimate situations. The questionnaire contains 90 items, and the respondent answers on a 4-point scale [5]. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alphas) in this study were .853 for *competences in situations requiring assertiveness* scale. The questionnaire makes it possible to calculate the overall result of social competences and – in addition to competences re-

quiring assertiveness – also the perceived level of competences in situations requiring intimacy and in situations of social exposure. The questionnaire can be used with people as young as 15 years old and norms are available for both young people and adults. The questionnaire was validated with a sample of the general population in Poland. Exemplary items are: “I can speak in a discussion in a larger group; I can defend a colleague who has been treated unfairly”.

The Formal Characteristics of Behavior – Temperament Questionnaire – Revised (FCB-TQ(R)) is a 100-item tool measuring the intensity of the 7 temperamental traits in terms of the Regulatory Theory of Temperament [22]. The respondent answers on a 4-point Likert scale. Examples

of items are “I lose confidence when someone criticizes me; I feel embarrassed if I have to outright refuse someone’s request”. In this study, only the results from the subscales of Activity and Emotional Reactivity were used. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach’s alphas) in this study were .843 for Emotional Reactivity subscale and .714 for Activity subscale.

RESULTS

In order to answer the research questions posed in this article, correlation and multiple regression analyzes were carried out, which are presented below.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and rPearson correlation between results of The Popular Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, The Social Competences Questionnaire and The Formal Characteristics of Behavior – Temperament Questionnaire.

	Assertiveness r	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Assertiveness (SCQ)		28	66	49.95	7.38
Emotional Reactivity (FCB-TQ(R))	-.450**	18	54	37.30	7.29
Activity (FCB-TQ(R))	.401**	23	60	40.24	6.72
Understanding emotions (PEIQ)	.240**	17	50	33.21	6.17
Acceptance of emotions (PEIQ)	.373**	32	72	54.8	7.6
Empathy (PEIQ)	.089	36	88	69.48	8.31
Emotional control (PEIQ)	.204**	17	48	33.06	6.90

** correlation significant at the level of .01

As shown in the table above, assertiveness significantly correlates with emotional reactivity (negative correlation), activity, understanding emotions, emotional acceptance, and emotional control. High scores in activity, understanding emotions, accepting emotions and control-

ling emotions are accompanied by a high scores in assertiveness.

In next step, a regression analysis was conducted, using all correlating variables (5) as predictors of assertiveness.

Table 2. Regression Coefficients and Explained Variability for results of The Social Competences Questionnaire (assertiveness) (N = 204)

Model	Beta	t	R2	cR2	F
(Const)		9.265**	.368	.358	38.78**
Emotional Reactivity (FCB-TQ(R))	-.388	-6.823**			
Activity (FCB-TQ(R))	.278	4.605**			
Acceptance of emotions (PEIQ)	.218	3.598**			
Empathy (PEIQ)	-.112	-1.594			
Emotional control (PEIQ)	-.135	-1.518			
Understanding emotions (PEIQ)	.061	.665			

**significant at the level of .01

Multiple regression analysis (input method) showed that 3 out of 5 correlating variables turned out to be significant predictors of assertiveness. The established model explained 36% variability of the results ($R^2 = .36$; $F(3, 200) = 38.78$; $p < .001$). The strongest predictor was emotional reactivity ($\beta = -.39$; $p < .001$), which is related negatively with assertiveness. This was followed by activity ($\beta = .28$; $p < .001$). The third predictor was acceptance of emotions ($\beta = .22$; $p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

The current study showed that emotional reactivity is negatively correlated with the level of assertive competences; is a negative predictor. A high level of emotional reactivity refers to “an intense reaction with emotions in situations of low stimulating value (...) a tendency to break down in difficult moments (...) frequent emotional stress [22, p. 64]. Emotional reactivity is associated with a low threshold of emotional arousal, which can help explain why certain seemingly innocuous everyday situations may result in non-assertive behaviours, in turn leading to feelings of emotional exhaustion. This is partly determined by the sensitivity and resistance of the nervous system, which is biologically conditioned and cannot cope with too much stimulation [23]. In accordance with the assumption that temperament is the basis for personality development [27], it can be expected that a high level of neuroticism will not be conducive to assertiveness. In the study conducted by Bagherian and Kraskian [56] neuroticism was shown to be a negative predictor of assertiveness; negative correlation was also revealed in study by Kirst [57]. As this author states: *The neurotic personality trait common in persons who fail to assert themselves might lend further support to the validity of the finding that assertiveness is directly related to self-esteem and inversely related to social anxiety* (p. 15). Highly reactive people have a low level of endurance [58] and situations in which the individual wants to be assertive often require cognitive control – reflecting on their current needs and appropriate expression – which can be difficult for people with a higher level of this temperamental variable. It is worth men-

tioning that one of the FCB-TQ(R) items, which is associated with both assertiveness and emotional reactivity: “I feel embarrassed if I have to refuse someone’s request directly” [22] – shows emotional discomfort during situations requiring assertiveness. According to Schwartz and Gottman [59], non-assertive people often know what to do, but are unable to transform their knowledge into assertive action. It seems as if they lack the sense of self-efficacy that would help reveal assertive behavior. To identify situation as requiring assertiveness, there is needed ability to identify current emotions (f.e. related to feeling if someone is exceeding individual’s internal boundaries) [1] and also enough level of self-efficacy which allows individual to behave in assertive way – which is indicator of social competences. As Mikołajczak [45] refers, what constitutes a skill in emotional intelligence is a result of knowledge (‘I know how to’), disposition (‘I want and often do it’), and actual ability (‘I can do it’). In terms of the socio-cognitive theory of Bandura [60], it can be assumed that people have the ability to repeat actions motorically, but cannot implement them – in the social context – into their behavioral repertoire.

The second temperamental trait related to assertiveness is activity – which turned out to be a positive predictor of assertiveness. People with a high level of activity undertake activities that are described as highly stimulating. They engage in social activities, establish professional social contacts [22]. It can be assumed that being active – as a feature of temperament – is related to taking actions and being active in the social context – and thus – such people naturally take part in social training. Natural social training develops social competences (which include assertiveness), provides knowledge about social functioning in various situations. While being in society, an individual acquires social knowledge by observing human behavior and can also estimate the effectiveness of individual reactions. Natural training takes place especially when struggling with difficult social and task situations. However, social competences can also be developed or improved through purposeful social training. It may take the form of special training, interpersonal training or workshops [61]. As Martowska [9] showed, assertive competences are positively associated with extraversion – it may be expect-

ed, that people with high level of extraversion may have higher level of social competences.

The current study showed that there is a positive correlation between the acceptance of emotional states and assertiveness. Assertiveness means expressing one's own emotions and opinion in an acceptable and respectful way. Self-respect refers to accepting one's own emotions and being aware of one's own limitations and possibilities [62]. Accepting emotions is "accepting, expressing and using own emotions in action" [55, p. 9]. On the one hand, assertiveness is the opposite of submission, and on the other – aggression [1]. Aggressive behavior is a style of behavior oriented towards the expression of anger, not the acceptance of these emotions. One of the processes aimed at increasing the acceptance of emotions is psychotherapy in the ACT approach [50]. According to this approach, mental discomfort should be accepted – instead of trying to avoid it [7]. According to Hayes [50], by shaping the ability to accept emotions, an individual can better feel and experience self. In addition, accepting own emotional responses strengthens the emotional flexibility necessary to engage in creating a life based on preferred values. According to Fensterheim and Baer [37], everyone has the right to live in harmony with own values, it is a manifestation of assertiveness. Acceptance does not refer to controlling emotions – it refers to allowing emotions to be what they are [50]. Acceptance of emotions is also expressed through the lack of manifestation of disagreement with experiencing negative emotions [63].

To sum up, emotional reactivity can be considered as an "interfering" factor in the acquisition and development of assertive behaviors. This does not mean, however, that people with a high level of this temperamental trait are doomed to lacking assertiveness. Instead, to be assertive, emotionally reactive people may have to do put more effort to control their emotions and bear higher mental costs. On the other hand, the second feature – activity – is conducive to assertiveness. Through resistance to strong stimuli, these people more easily endure difficult situations, enter social relationships, thus acquiring social competences. It is worth emphasizing that there is a negative correlation between activity and reactivity – the higher the level of activity the low-

er the level of emotional reactivity [22] – perhaps highly reactive people avoid various situations that require assertiveness, and do not behave assertively, due to emotional breakdown in difficult moments (and this is how situations requiring assertiveness can be interpreted).

In the CBT approach, the development of assertive competences may be associated with thought experiments (in vivo), involving imagining a person who is in a situation requiring assertiveness, focusing on the reaction, on what happens to the body and thoughts. Many people with a low level of assertive skills know what and how to behave assertively, but are unable to use this knowledge in practice, due to maladaptive assumptions [64]. The role-playing process during a meeting with a therapist often demonstrates the level of this disparity. In real situations, a person may become so intensely aroused that the most adaptive responses in terms of assertiveness will not be chosen, instead relying on more automatic (often less desirable) responses. The next step could be to focus on observing self in real situations and trying to act appropriately, assertively, and observing what happens to thoughts and behavior after an assertive reaction [65].

Work on strengthening areas related to assertiveness is similar in the approach of schema therapy – work is carried out on replacing maladaptive patterns with new, more adaptive patterns of behavior. The patient's reflective approach can help him see how different situations reinforced maladaptive schemas [66].

Lack of assertiveness may lead to increased feelings of maladaptive anger. The second possibility is that adaptive anger may lead to (or be expressed as) assertive behavior. But on the other hand, after that individual may feel guilty, because of schema, which is described as one should not behave in assertive way. The way to deal with it, is to accept that feeling and continuous assertive behavior. Changing that schema will also change an emotional sphere – positive change will cause self-efficacy, self-confident and self-esteem. Assertiveness is a competence that should be constantly developed and should not be neglected [67]. People who struggle asserting themselves, may benefit from an assessment not only of their social competences, but also their baseline level of emotional reactivity.

CONCLUSION

The intensity of temperamental traits is the foundation of specific personality traits. To some extent, as we showed in the study, they also explain the intensity of assertive traits. While temperament is partly dependent on the environment, social competences – including assertiveness – are developed in social life. Due to the fact that, according to the assumptions of the Regulatory Theory of Temperament, temperamental features are relatively constant, emotional reactivity also remains at a relatively constant human level. This does not mean, however, that people with, for example, a high degree of this temperamental trait are “doomed” to low assertiveness. They may behave assertively, but we believe that they will incur greater psychological costs in developing assertiveness. It seems reasonable that techniques of working with anxiety in psychotherapy – e.g. in the CBT approach – are beneficial in the context of exercising assertiveness. What undoubtedly contributes to the increase in social competences – at least on the basis of building knowledge about them – is activity (in terms of RTT), i.e. engaging in many situations, including those of a social nature. In addition, the emotional intelligence component seems to be important – i.e. acceptance of emotions, which also explains part of the variance in assertive competences. Social situations that require assertiveness are often difficult, sometimes the only thing individual can do is accept the emotions that arise.

Limitations of the study

It is worth to take under consideration other factors related to assertiveness – including personality skills, stress coping styles or factors linked with upbringing – in the study, selected factors explained 36% of variability of the results. Another limitation of the study is the lack of estimation of the sample size. A certain shortcoming in questionnaire-based assertiveness studies is their subjective, self-descriptive nature. The respondent imagines how he or she would handle a given situation – this gives rise to the danger of making a basic self-attribution error of underestimating the social context and possible strength of social pressure.

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