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## Empathy Versus Experiencing and Using Aggression Among Adolescents

**Abstract:** Young people are at risk from acts of aggression both at school, in the family and from their peers. Frequently, the victims themselves begin to manifest it as a result of experiencing it from other people. Another determinant of the level of aggression is mass media or negative role models (e.g. the use of humiliating and compromising images and words). Empathy is a skill which enables one to recognize another person's inner states and processes when coming into contact with the person. Thanks to it, one is able to share the emotions of the other person, which reduces the risk of aggressive behavior. Therefore, it is vital that activities aiming at the development of empathy and reduction of aggression be included into working with adolescents. Such activities may include sensitizing training, aggression substitution training, relaxation training or psychoeducational workshops. The aim of the study was to determine the level of emotional and cognitive empathy of aggressive victims as compared to young people experiencing or using aggression.

**Key words:** empathy, aggression, aggressive victim, victim.

### Theoretical introduction

The scale of violence testifies to its universality in various social and professional groups and environments: school, family and work. Aggression is defined as "action against persons or property, evoking the discontent and anger in the individual" (Surzykiewicz 2000, p. 13). It can take many forms: verbal, physical, direct,

indirect, overt, covert, instrumental, task-oriented, self-aggression, etc. (Wolińska et al. 2000, p.16). Among factors determining it, the most frequently mentioned are social and biological factors. This is why it is explained in the category of innate instincts, reaction to frustration, biological drives or response to social stimuli reinforced negatively or positively (Grochulska 1982, p. 6– 7). On the one hand, it is sometimes recognized as a constructive phenomenon used for the protection and survival of the individual in a given environment, and on the other – destructive, of criminal character, manifested by cruelty (Wysocka 2008, p. 271).

Due to the nature of the research, physical and emotional aggression have an important place. The first occurs when the aggressor directly and physically attacks the victim or an object. He inflicts suffering, using his own body parts or different kinds of objects (Rode 2010, p. 41). In contrast, emotional aggression may be expressed in words (e.g. by using insults, verbal threats), or by gestures (e.g. using insulting gestures, contemptuous facial expression). A frequent source of its transmission is mass media, especially the Internet and mobile phones (e.g. the use of humiliating and compromising images, especially photographs – Jaworska 2012, p. 17).

Regardless of what type of aggression is used by the offender, he derives pleasure from inflicting suffering to his victims, to which an internal unrest and own suffering “pushes” him, caused by, among others, the deprivation of needs, particularly emotional (Kocemba 2009, p. 135). He receives and interprets social situations as frustrating and threatening, which in turn provokes him to aggression, consolidated through negative social patterns. He has problems with self-control, especially in terms of emotions (Kosewski 1977, p. 137–138). His victims can be all sorts of people. Mostly, however, they are people who are in some way distinguished from the rest of the social group in which they live. They are considered to be “different” – weak in terms of the physical and/or mental, economic, social, e.g. overweight, disabled, unable to defend themselves in a situation of threat, etc. (Kocemba 2009, p. 133). They are often characterized by a certain feature, e.g. skin color, speech impediment, wearing glasses. The next group of potential victims consists of people called “at hand”, usually accidentally encountered by the aggressor, who become the object of unloading frustration. Another group is defenseless children, who at the moment of attack do not undertake any action and those who in the past were victims, and now have difficulty freeing themselves from the bad experiences (Georg 2008, p. 26– 27). Potential victims are characterized by low self-esteem, self-assessment and other social skills, and they do not respect themselves (Kocemba 2009, p. 133). In a threatening situation they behave defensively. They are often submissive, they perform all the commands of their friends and reach for ineffective ways of establishing contact with members of the group. At other times they are servile, because they cannot decide for themselves and do not have their own opinion. They also often buy into the grace of peers by giving out gifts, or they complain to teachers about

various misdemeanors of their friends, thereby breaking the rules prevailing in the group (George 2008, p. 28).

Passive victims exhibit a low self-esteem. They feel lonely and rejected. They are sensitive, shy, vulnerable to the influence of others, and fearful. They prefer contacts with adults than with their peers. Provoking victims themselves incite others to violence. They build a tense atmosphere, among others, through significant mood swings. They are very active, restless and exhibit attention deficit disorder. In contrast, aggressive victims defend themselves by using aggression against their wrongdoers (Methodical guide for teachers 2004, p. 12).

Empathy is the second phenomenon relevant from the point of view of the human psychosocial functioning. Sherman believes that one can speak about it in the emotional context, treating it as experiencing similar emotions by the observer and the observed person (Lewicka 2006, p. 14). It is also recognized in the category of cognitive phenomena. For example, Jerzy Mellibruda (1986) defines it as an ability involving the exploration of internal states and processes related to the person with whom one comes into contact (Lewicka 2006, p. 16). According to Janusz Reykowski (1979) empathy can also be considered in terms of communication. Then, this term means the process of establishing relationships, putting yourself in the other person's shoes and the appropriate perception of their reactions (Lewicka 2006, p. 16). By intending to give full empathy it is shown as multi-dimensional. For example, Mark H. Davis (1999, p. 23) by defining empathy, exposes reactions of the entity on the experience of others, and J. Moors – its emotional, cognitive, moral and behavioral context (source: Wilczek-Rużyczka 2002, p. 12). The entity tries to understand the suffering of the other person, puts himself in his situation, thus stimulating his own emotions, and then makes a choice of whether to continue to participate in the emotions of the other person or to break up the relationship. In assessing the situation, the entity is guided by the social norms prevailing in the environment as well as his own knowledge and experience. Consequently, he understands the partner's interaction and presents his own point of view, similar to the observed person (Wilczek-Rużyczka 2002, p. 12–13).

Empathy serves an informational function, which consists in the fact that the human being has the ability to understand another person's emotions and predict his actions. Furthermore, it helps to obtain information on the social environment where he lives (Preston et al. 2002, p.1). In contrast, the social function of empathy comes down to strengthening ties with other people. People who make an effort to understand and support another person in different situations become close to them as a result. They form new friendships and develop a sense of community<sup>1</sup>. Empathy closely correlates to the observance of ethical and moral

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<sup>1</sup> Chartrand. T., Baragh. J.A., The Chameleon effect: The perception-Behavior Link and Social Interaction, [http://www.pedagogika.uksw.edu.pl/konspekt\\_doktoratu\\_Maciej\\_Ciechomski.pdf/](http://www.pedagogika.uksw.edu.pl/konspekt_doktoratu_Maciej_Ciechomski.pdf/) [access: 15.06.2015].

principles and current norms. This results in lower levels of aggression and the strengthening of social relationships (Goleman 1999, p. 172, 175). It also determines the occurrence of altruistic behavior. Feeling the pain and fear of other people triggers the body's internal needs to mitigate losses and provide support (Davis 1999, p. 175).

## Methodological basis of research

The results of the research conducted so far indicate that contemporary youth is struggling both with the problem of aggression and emotional desensitization (see e.g. Lewicka 2010, p. 98). Therefore, the aim of the original study was to determine the level of emotional and cognitive empathy of aggressive victims, i.e. people who torment other people as a result of experiencing aggression from others.

The study used the diagnostic survey method. To distinguish the compared groups of adolescents Scale "A" and Scale "O" of Krystyna Kmiecik-Baran (1999)<sup>2</sup> was used, and to determine the level of empathy of the respondents – the Interpersonal Reactivity Index developed by Mark Davis in the adaptation of Agnieszka Lewicka (2006)<sup>3</sup>.

The following detailed questions were formulated:

- How often do middle school pupils use and experience emotional and physical aggression?
- What level of emotional and cognitive empathy characterize aggressive victims, victims and aggressors?
- To what extent is the surveyed youth empathetic?
- Does variable empathy differentiate the surveyed youth who use and experience aggression of varying degrees? If so, to what extent?
- Is there a link between emotional and cognitive empathy versus experiencing and using aggression by the surveyed youth?

The study was conducted in 2014 among middle school pupils from the Lublin province. Initially 197 people were surveyed, of whom 90 pupils were deliberately selected in an effort to identify three groups: 1 – persons who use aggression but do not experience it (aggressors); 2 – persons who experience aggression but do not use it (victims); 3 – persons who both use and experience aggression (aggressive victims). The selection was based on the results of research

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<sup>2</sup> Psychometric properties of the tool are satisfactory (rtt for Scale A was 0.96 and for Scale O – 0.95; a high internal consistency of individual subscales with the general result of the scale was demonstrated) (see Kmiecik-Baran K. 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Psychometric properties of the tool are satisfactory (rtt was 0.97; the index correlates with the Questionnaire Measure of Emotional Empathy –  $r = 0.43$ ). The reader will find a description of the tool in the monograph o A. Lewicka (2006, p. 103-106).

carried out using the Scales “A” and “O”. Thirty people were qualified to the base group, who had a high degree of both experiencing and using aggression. Then 30 people were identified who received high scores on the scale of experiencing aggression (low and average – 1– 5 sten – results in the scale of using aggression), and 30 people with the highest scores in the scale of using aggression (low and average – 1– 5 sten – results in the scale of experiencing aggression). In this way, Krystyna Ostrowska’s reports were confirmed (2003, p. 12), which proves that young people often react with aggression, and on the other hand, they experience it themselves from others.

Table 1. Surveyed youth experiencing aggression (n = 197)

Variables	M	Sd
Experiencing emotional aggression	23.43	22.56
Experiencing physical aggression	8.38	8.22
Experiencing aggression	31.81	29.21

Explanations: M – mean; Sd – standard deviation

Source: own study.

The raw results obtained on the basis of Scale O, expressed in sten<sup>4</sup>, indicate the high level of experiencing aggression by the surveyed youth. This situation may be due to the powerlessness of young people in the face of reality. In addition, people who are shy and have difficulty in seeking assistance often experience aggression (Ostrowska 2003, p. 17). One should note the higher mean score on the scale of emotional aggression in contrast to physical aggression, which means that the surveyed youth experiences aggression more often in the emotional form.

Table 2. Surveyed youth using aggression (n = 197)

Variables	M	Sd
Using emotional aggression	25.17	20.37
Using physical aggression	11.31	13.45
Using aggression	36.37	32.37

Source: own study.

The results obtained in scale “A” indicate a high level of aggression use by the surveyed youth<sup>5</sup>. There are so many causes of aggressive behavior that it is

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<sup>4</sup> On the basis of the standards drawn up for Scale O developed by K. Kmiecik-Baran, the raw result is expressed in sten (K. Kmiecik-Baran, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> On the basis of the standards drawn up for Scale O developed by K. Kmiecik-Baran, the raw result is expressed in sten (K. Kmiecik-Baran, 2000).

difficult to determine the type of their conditions. It can be assumed that some pupils hurt others and humiliate them with the desire to impress their friends, due to the overly strong feeling of emotional tension (Palak 2012, p. 249 ff.). It was also determined that the subjects are more likely to use emotional aggression than physical aggression.

Based on the information gathered from the adolescents qualified to the actual study, their characteristics were made (Table. 3).

Table 3. Characteristics of respondents (n = 90)

	n	%
Sex		
Woman	42	47
Man	48	53
Age		
13 y.o.	19	21
14 y.o.	68	76
15 y.o.	3	3
Place of residence		
Village	54	60
City	36	40
Mother's education		
Primary	3	3
Vocational	23	26
High School	22	24
University	42	47
Father's education		
Primary	2	2
Vocational	19	21
High School	37	41
University	30	33
Total	90	100

Source: own study.

The study involved 90 pupils. There were only slightly more boys than girls, as they accounted for 53% of the total. There were a few individuals who were aged 15 years old, but the vast majority constituted pupils at the age of 14 years old (76%). The group of adolescents was dominated by people living in rural ar-

eas (60%). The mothers of the respondents most often had a university education (47%) and the fathers – high school graduation certificates (41%).

## Results of own study

According to Janusz Reykowski (1979) empathy has many valuable functions in the psychosocial sphere of human functioning (Lewicka 2006, p. 16). As evidenced by the results of research conducted by Andrzej Węgliński (1983, p. 322) some young people are characterized by a low level of empathy, the causes of which can be traced to a number of environmental factors, among which the negative messages of media is distinguishable (Braun-Gałkowska, Ulfik-Jaworska 2002, p. 11). However, this does not show that the level of empathy is conditioned solely by environmental factors, including the media. Empathy is to some extent determined biologically and may be treated in terms of capacity. Furthermore, the differentiation of its level depending on variables such as: sex, age, type of life experiences, level of psychosocial functioning of the individual, method of socialization and upbringing, etc. have been proven. According to Lewicka (2006, p. 57) empathy “evolves, both in the emotional and cognitive context, wherein cognitive empathy is to a greater extent determined exogenously”.

Thanks to the results obtained on the basis of the Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index in the adaptation of Lewicka (2006) it was possible to verify whether, and if so to what extent, the compared groups of youth differ in terms of empathy, in the following aspects: empathetic imagination, empathetic response in difficult situations, empathetic response to the negative experiences of others and taking the perspective of other people.

Calculated arithmetic means and standard deviations for individual IRI scales (Tab. 4).

Table 4. Emotional and cognitive empathy in the surveyed group of youth

Variables	M	Sd
Empathetic response to the negative experiences of others	8.83 (2.21)	3.31
Taking the perspective of other people	13.13 (2.63)	4.20
Empathetic imagination	10.77 (2.34)	3.76
Empathetic response in difficult situations	11.68 (1.95)	4.07
Emotional and cognitive empathy	44.42 (2.22)	7.57

Source: own study.

Due to the diverse number of items per each of the scales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, the mean value was divided by the number of questions, and the results are given in brackets in the second column of Table 4<sup>6</sup>. Thus obtained values indicate that the surveyed adolescents most highly assessed their skills in taking the perspective of others and in imagining what others feel. In contrast, it had the greatest difficulty with an empathetic response in difficult situations. Most of the respondents claimed that sometimes they empathize with other people. The youths provided the most unanimous answers in the scale of empathetic responses to negative experiences of others and empathetic imagination.

In order to grasp the differences between the compared groups, the t-distribution for independent samples was used (aggressive victims, victims, aggressors)<sup>7</sup>. The values of the F homogeneity of variance test, means (M), standard deviations (Sd) and values of the t-distribution test for independent samples with levels of statistical significance (p) are provided in Tables 5–7.

Table 5. Differences in mean scores of emotional and cognitive empathy of aggressive victims and victims of school aggression

Variables	Group	F	P	M	Sd	t-distribution	p
Empathetic response to the negative experiences of others	aggressive victim	1.567	n.i.	8.33 (2.08)	3.65	-1.828	n.i.
	victim			9.87 (2.47)	2.79		
Taking the perspective of other people	aggressive victim	0.554	n.i.	12.10 (2.42)	3.86	-2.070	0.05
	victim			14.23 (2.85)	4.50		
Empathetic imagination	aggressive victim	0.160	n.i.	9.87 (1.98)	3.81	-1.660	n.i.
	victim			11.43 (2.29)	3.49		
Empathetic response in difficult situations	aggressive victim	0.795	n.i.	12.27 (2.05)	4.79	1.412	n.i.
	victim			10.73 (1.79)	3.51		
Emotional and cognitive empathy	aggressive victim	0.728	n.i.	42.60 (2.13)	8.73	-1.818	n.i.
	victim			46.27 (2.31)	6.77		

Source: own study.

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<sup>6</sup> In this way, the average mean ratio was determined, i.e. a more simplified “standardized” mean was determined.

<sup>7</sup> A simplified statistical procedure was applied due to the sample size. In the future, it is planned to perform a detailed analysis of a larger study group using analysis of variance.



The scope of the individual scales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index includes different numbers of claims; therefore, in the table, under the arithmetic mean values, there are values entered which were obtained from the quotient of the arithmetic mean and the number of questions in the given scale. Such a treatment makes it possible to compare the results between the different indicators of empathy.

The value of the F test shows the homogeneity of variance for all IRI scales. The results obtained by the surveyed youth are within the middle range, which suggests that the answer “sometimes” was most frequently selected (3 pts.). The values of the t-distribution help to determine that between the mean scores of cognitive empathy of people from the compared groups there was a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ). Aggressive victims have a much greater difficulty in adopting the point of view of other people than young people who experienced aggression from others. Moreover, people from the base group were the most empathetic in the scale of cognitive empathy, since the results of this scale approached 4 points. In other IRI scales, they assessed their empathetic skills as even lower. In contrast, youth from the comparison group, aside from the scale of taking the perspective of other people, also indicated the one concerning the empathetic response to the negative experiences of others. The greatest empathy deficits occurred in the area of empathetic imagination (aggressive victims), and empathic response in difficult situations (victims). Sd values indicate a slightly greater heterogeneity of the results of the base group than in the comparison group – off the scale of taking the perspective of other people.

Table 6. Differences in mean scores of emotional and cognitive empathy of aggressive victims and aggressors

Variables	Group	F	P	M	Sd	t-distribution	p
Empathetic response to the negative experiences of others	aggressive victim	0.715	n.i.	8.33 (2.08)	3.65	0.037	n.i.
	aggressor			8.30 (2.07)	3.28		
Taking the perspective of other people	aggressive victim	0.023	n.i.	12.10 (2.42)	3.86	-0.944	n.i.
	aggressor			13.06 (2.61)	4.07		
Empathetic imagination	aggressive victim	0.165	n.i.	9.87 (1.97)	3.81	-1.136	n.i.
	aggressor			11.00 (2.2)	3.91		

Variables	Group	F	P	M	Sd	t-distribution	p
Empathetic response in difficult situations	aggressive victim	0.870	n.i.	12.27 (2.05)	4.79	0.210	n.i.
	aggressor			12.03 (2.01)	3.75		
Emotional and cognitive empathy	aggressive victim	1.468	n.i.	42.60 (2.13)	8.73	-0.888	n.i.
	aggressor			44.40 (2.22)	6.86		

Source: own study.

In terms of the results obtained in Davis' Interpersonal Reactivity Index the compared groups of adolescents – people experiencing violence from others behaving in an aggressive manner, and the victims of aggression – can be considered homogeneous, as indicated by the F test. In all the scales of the research tool used, the results of the surveyed youth oscillate around the average obtainable, i.e. 2 points. Between the mean scores in different IRI scales obtained by those responding aggressively with varying intensity, there were no statistically significant differences found. This means that all respondents similarly assess their skill of empathetic response in different situations. The scores obtained by dividing the arithmetic mean by the number of questions for the given scale indicate that individuals from both compared groups recognized that they have the greatest ease in taking the perspective of other people. It is the most difficult for aggressive victims to imagine the experiences of other people, and for victims of aggression – to react emphatically in difficult situations.

Table 7. Differences in mean scores of emotional and cognitive empathy of victims and aggressors

Variables	Group	F	p	M	Sd	t-distribution	p
Empathetic response to the negative experiences of others	victim	0.069	n.i.	9.87 (2.47)	2.79	2.103	0.05
	aggressor			8.30 (2.08)	3.28		
Taking the perspective of other people	victim	0.330	n.i.	14.23 (2.85)	4.50	1.053	n.i.
	aggressor			13.07 (2.61)	4.07		

Variables	Group	F	p	M	Sd	t-distribution	p
Empathetic imagination	victim	0.005	n.i.	11.43 (2.29)	3.49	0.453	n.i.
	aggressor			11.00 (2.2)	3.91		
Empathetic response in difficult situations	victim	0.021	n.i.	10.73 (1.79)	3.51	-1.385	n.i.
	aggressor			12.03 (2.01)	3.76		
Emotional and cognitive empathy	victim	0.278	n.i.	46.27 (2.31)	6.77	1.061	n.i.
	aggressor			44.40 (2.22)	6.86		

Source: own study.

For all Interpersonal Reactivity Index scales, the results of Levene's test are not statistically significant, which means that homogeneity of variance in the compared groups must be assumed. In analyzing the t-distribution, we observed a clear difference between the group of victims and aggressors in the scale of empathetic response to the negative experiences of others ( $p < 0.05$ ). People experiencing aggression definitely find it easier than aggressors to respond empathetically in situations that cause negative emotions in other people. Respondents from both groups assess their skills of taking the perspective of other people the highest, and the lowest – the ability to respond in difficult situations.

The raw results were converted into sten, which helped to determine the level of emotional and cognitive empathy in the compared groups of youth. For this purpose, three levels of empathy were distinguished: low, average and high. It was examined how the groups of youth in the study are diverse in terms of level of empathy (Tab. 8).

Table 8. The level of emotional and cognitive empathy of the surveyed youth

Emotional and cognitive empathy	Groups							
	aggressive victim		victim		aggressor		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Low	24	80	27	90	25	83.3	76	84.4
Average	4	13.3	2	6.7	3	10	9	10
High	2	6.7	1	3.3	2	6.7	5	5.6

Emotional and cognitive empathy	Groups							
	aggressive victim		victim		aggressor		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Total	30	100	30	100	30	100	90	100

Chi-square = 1.251; 4; p – n.i. (test value for three groups: aggressive victim – victim-aggressor); Chi-square = 0.163; 2; p – n.i. (test value for two groups: aggressive victim – aggressor); Chi-square = 1.176; 2; p – n.i. (test value for two groups: aggressive victim – victim)

Source: own study.

The Chi-squared test was used to check how much the variable “level of empathy” differentiates the surveyed groups of youth, separated on the basis of the level used and experienced aggression. The value of the Chi-squared test enables to conclude that the level of emotional and cognitive empathy is no different in the compared groups of youth. The vast majority of respondents is characterized by low levels of the variable. Only individual cases experiencing and using aggression in varying degrees find it very easy to get into the emotional states of other people and take their perspective of certain matters and situations. The result obtained can attest to the fact that only 15 people of the 90 adolescents are able to consciously understand the experiences of other people without losing their own identity. Overall, it was found that the respondents, regardless of how aggressive they are or use aggression, show deficiencies in terms of emotional and cognitive empathy.

Table 9. The relationship between experiencing and using aggression by youth versus its empathy

Variables	Empathetic response to the negative experiences of others	Taking the perspective of other people	Empathetic imagination	Empathetic response in difficult situations	Emotional and cognitive empathy
Experiencing emotional aggression	0.067	-0.066	-0.210*	0.101	-0.065
Experiencing physical aggression	-0.038	-0.202	-0.209*	0.156	-0.148
Experiencing aggression	0.041	-0.108	-0.221*	0.122	-0.092
Using emotional aggression	-0.079	-0.249*	-0.272**	0.156	-0.221*

Variables	Empathetic response to the negative experiences of others	Taking the perspective of other people	Empathetic imagination	Empathetic response in difficult situations	Emotional and cognitive empathy
Using physical aggression	-0.050	-0.198	-0.308**	0.262*	-0.148
Using aggression	-0.070	-0.240*	-0.305**	0.210*	-0.202

Explanations: \* correlation significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* correlation significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

Source: own study.

In the present study, it was assumed that empathy is a deterrent to aggression. After Lewicka (2006, p. 71) it was assumed that “there is a negative relationship between aggression and empathy, which means that an increase in the level of one variable is associated with lower levels of another variable.” In order to verify whether variables correlate with one another, and if so, to what extent, the r-Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated (after the exclusion of the curvilinear dependence by preparing a scatterplot). These data are in Table 9.

Analyzing the data in Table 7, it was found that empathetic imagination has a weak negative correlation with experiencing ( $p < 0.05$ ) as well as adolescents using physical and emotional aggression ( $p < 0.01$ ). This means that the high scores of the adolescents’ fantasies are accompanied by low results in aggression scale. In addition, the low scores of cognitive empathy as well as emotional and cognitive empathy (determined on the basis of the scale of taking the perspective of others) are accompanied by high scores on the scale of used emotional aggression ( $p < 0.05$ ). In contrast, between the results of empathic response in difficult situations and the use of physical aggression occurred weak negative correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## Discussing the results

Our findings indicate the occurrence of a negative correlation between taking the perspective of other people and the used emotional aggression ( $p < 0.05$ ) (see Lewicka 2002, p. 41). In addition, the high scores in the scale of empathetic response in difficult situations are accompanied by low ones in the scale of using physical aggression ( $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, they confirm earlier studies carried out in order to grasp the relationship between empathy and aggression. Empathetic people exhibit low levels of aggression and often behave in a prosocial manner. They are more benevolent in respect of others and respect the social norms more

frequently compared to the less empathetic (Węgliński 1983, p. 322– 324; Węgliński 1984, p. 118– 119).

It seems that an efficiently functioning person should have a high level of cognitive empathy and average (with a tendency of up to high) emotional empathy. Strong empathetic sensitivity is often one of the determinants of emotional burnout and anxiety disorders. This is because people who are very emotionally empathetic “take over” the negative emotions of their interaction partners. You can also assume that the victims of violence sympathize more for others who experience negative emotions, similar to their own. In other scales of empathy they may not be different from aggressors, but still use empathy for other purposes. The perpetrators can imagine what their victims feel, and then use this knowledge to manipulate their victims and inflict even greater harm. They try to understand them better in order to effectively hurt them. While the victims, despite their previous sensitivity, could have experienced the process of desensitizing negative emotions. Their present reactions can therefore be much weaker. Such thinking to some extent explains the lack of differences in empathy between the compared groups of youth.

## Summary

Both victims and perpetrators of aggression require support. Victims often do not cope with the situation and are subject to manipulation, as a result, they isolate themselves and close up. In contrast, aggressors act out their anger, failures and frustration on other people.

In order to minimize the phenomenon of aggression and to increase the level of empathy of adolescents sensitivity training is conducted. They are aimed at forming and strengthening emotional relationships between people and boosting sensitivity in relation to another human being. They foster the development of skills such as: being sympathetic to the situation of another person, establishing interpersonal contacts, expressing own feelings and understanding the feelings of others. Furthermore, participation in such training raises motivation to undertake social activities. It is important that pupils can benefit from such an educational offer from an early age, because empathy training is most effective when started as early as possible. It results in more permanent changes in the personality of a person (Wilczek-Rużyczka 2002, p. 35–36).

Another form of help for reducing the level of aggression is ART – Aggression Replacement Training, which includes three components: pro-social skills training, anger control training and moral reasoning training. The first component allows one to develop and improve skills in: communication, planning, asking for help and expressing emotions (Morawska, Morawski 2006a, p. 83). The second concerns the recognition of the causes of anger and signs of feeling negative emo-

tions. It also consists in learning to use so-called reducers, which lower the level of anger and prompts, i.e. conducting internal dialogue (Morawska, Morawski 2006b, p. 105). In the last part of the course the problems of individuals are analyzed together with the group and solutions are sought – the most appropriate from a moral point of view. The main objective of this part of the training is to increase the sense of decency, justice, emphasize the need to take into account the rights and needs of others (Morawska, Morawski 2006c, p. 95).

In working with victims and aggressors, one can also use relaxation training, which helps to unwind, reduce general tension and induce a feeling of calm. Additionally, classes of a psychoeducational character may result in an increase in self-confidence and openness and a decrease in shyness as well as the intensity of provocative behavior (Bartkowicz 2001, p. 178).

## Literature

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