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The relationship between assertiveness and self-esteem of the high school teenagers

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Abstract. Ralph Waldo Emerson says “to be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment”. Assertiveness is the skill which can be learned and it is formed and developed in time. Teenagers need to be assertive in order to become self- confident and win the respect of their friends, colleagues and even their teachers. Moreover, the assertive behaviour gives the youth the chance of expressing their own emotions and feelings in a way in which they can satisfy their needs and wishes without disturbing the people around them.

Keywords. assertiveness, teenagers, self-confident, accomplishments.

Introduction

The social, economic and cultural changes from nowadays society are so deep that the adaptation proves to be difficult for people who cannot get the necessary skills for achieving professional performance or finding out solutions for economic and social problems. The skills which are necessary for getting social abilities are: communication, empathy, self-confidence, gratification, solving problems and assertiveness.

The adolescence is the period of time during which the greatest physical, mental, social and emotional changes happen. The training of the adolescents for becoming assertive aims at helping them to change their self-perception so that they will be able to express their emotions and thoughts appropriately and build their self-confidence. It has been proved that programs which contribute to becoming assertive have had positive benefits for the teenagers' self-esteem and determined the reduction of the self-competing or the improving of the place of control. Assertiveness helps teenagers to have the right attitude in social situations and accomplish their objectives. It is relevant both for taking decisions and preparing the young people to be successful in doing their duties in real world, such as buying groceries, looking for a job, interaction with people around them and giving up shyness.

The adolescents try hard to develop the establishment of their identity by becoming members of the society and choosing a vocation. That is why it is important that they should



develop a healthy self-esteem. Assertiveness and self-esteem have many points in common. Both of them are necessary and important character traits which help people to have a satisfactory life and healthy relationships with other people. Assertive teenagers are self-confident in their capacity of having efficient interaction with the other. Thus, the investigation of the deep interaction between the assertiveness and self-esteem may emphasize the ways in which the next generations should be educated in order that they could develop without abusing the other people's rights. It is desirable that we should help teenagers become assertive than determine them to overcome the self-defence models which have already made part of their lives.

During this work, we tried to see if there is a link between the assertiveness, self-esteem and the personality traits of the high school teenagers. The research about the assertiveness as a social ability [1] shows that this construction has a number of different dimensions, including the skill of expressing yourself without anxiety or aggressivity in different situations [2]. Although the assertiveness can be regarded as a behaviour to the external world, it is, at the same time, strongly associated with feelings to oneself. Thus, it seems that the association of the assertiveness with depression and self-esteem is more powerful than the social disfunction. The factors associated with the assertive behaviour, such as extraversion, self-control, introversion, social fears or social self-esteem, could offer a better understanding of the assertive behaviour during the adolescence. At the same time self-regulation as a characteristic of common socialization and the capacity of having control under stressful or conflictual situations could be one of the most important factors which are necessary for the development of the teenagers. [3]

One of the approaching about the understanding of the assertiveness considers it a personality trait and a communication style, too. From this point of view, personality and cognitive approaching produce a communication style defined as a learnt predisposition whose aim is answering to some clues according to some patterns. The researchers in the field of assertiveness identify the elements which make distinction between the assertive individuals [4]: the determination of all the participants' rights, the development of the persuading answers without judging or blaming the others, taking into account the possible negative consequences of expressing your own points of views. Alberti and Emmons [5] consider that assertive people are able to act in their own interest without experiencing excessive anxiety or breaking the rights of the others. On the other hand, non-assertiveness means communicating the points of views in such a shy and self-depreciative way that makes the other people to ignore or reject them very easily [6]. In conclusion, being assertive represents a balance between being aggressive and being obedient, which encourages the self-esteem, the respect for the others and cooperation.

Objectives

- Identifying the correlation between the assertiveness and self-esteem of the high school teenagers.
- Identifying the correlation between the self-esteem and personality traits of the high school teenagers.

Hypotheses

H_{S1} It is assumed that there is a direct correlation between the assertiveness and self-esteem of the high school teenagers aged between 15-17.



H_{S2} It is assumed that there is a direct correlation between the self-esteem and the personality traits (extraversion, emotional stability and autonomy) of the high school teenagers aged between 15-17.

Lot of participants

The research has been performed on a number of 120 teenagers (60 boys and 60 girls) age 15-17 years enrolled in a theoretical high school in Constanta.

Instruments

To demonstrate these correlations between assertiveness, self-esteem and personality traits, we applied the S.C. Questionnaire (The analyse of the communication style), the Self-Esteem scale (RSES) and the FFPI Questionnaire. The S.C. Questionnaire is relevant for the four essential communication styles: assertive, non-assertive, aggressive and manipulative. The Self-esteem Scale is about the self-image, self-esteem, a scale which is largely used in the fields of the social and clinical psychology. The FFPI Questionnaire analyses the evaluation of the five personality factors: extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, amiability and autonomy.

Interpretation of results

Hypothesis 1: It is assumed that there is a direct correlation between the assertiveness and self-esteem of the high school teenagers aged between 15-17.

Table 1.1. Descriptives

		Statistic	Std. Error
Non-assertive style	Mean	7.40	.280
	Median	7.00	
	Variance	9.402	
	Std. Deviation	3.066	
Aggressive style	Mean	7.65	.249
	Median	8.00	
	Variance	7.456	
	Std. Deviation	2.731	
Manipulative style	Mean	7.53	.222
	Median	7.00	
	Variance	5.932	
	Std. Deviation	2.436	
Assertive style	Mean	11.13	.218
	Median	11.50	
	Variance	5.690	
	Std. Deviation	2.385	
Self esteem	Mean	30.46	.504
	Median	30.50	
	Variance	30.519	
	Std. Deviation	5.524	

The start statistics indexes visible in the above table show that for the teenagers who have a non-assertive style: mean 7.40 and median 7.00, variance 9.402, std. deviation 3.066,



for those who have an aggressive style: mean 7.65 and median 8.00, variance 7.456, std. deviation 2.731, for those who have a manipulative style: mean 7.53 and median 7.00, variance 5.932, std. deviation 2.436, for those who have an assertive style: mean 11.13 and median 11.50, variance 5.690, std. deviation 2.385, and for those who have self-esteem: mean 30.46 and median 30.50, variance 30.519, std. deviation 5.524.

Table 1.2. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Non-assertive style	.110	120	.001	.973	120	.015
Aggressive style	.106	120	.002	.969	120	.007
Manipulative style	.135	120	.000	.968	120	.006
Assertive style	.146	120	.000	.932	120	.000
Self esteem	.086	120	.031	.978	120	.050

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Normal distributions have been obtained ($\text{sig} < 0.05$), thus non parametric method of comparison has been applied (Spearman).

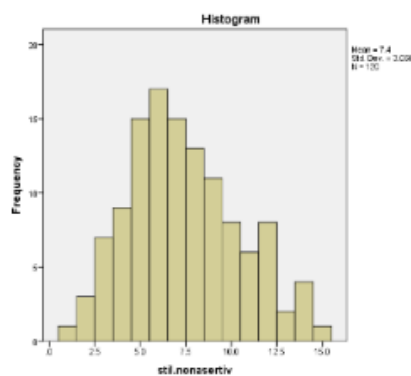


Figure 1.1. Histogram of simple frequencies – non-assertive style of teenagers

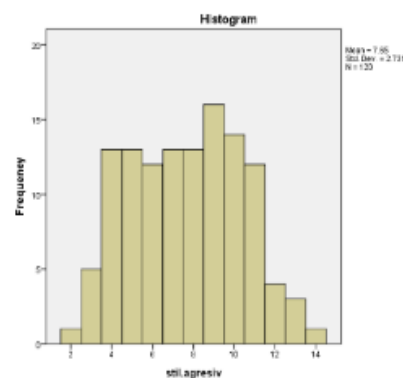


Figure 1.2. Histogram of simple frequencies – aggressive style of teenagers

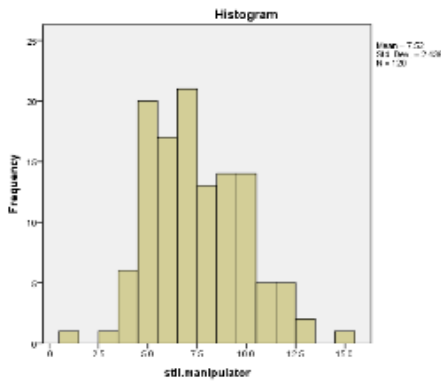


Figure 1.3. Histogram of simple frequencies – manipulative style of teenagers

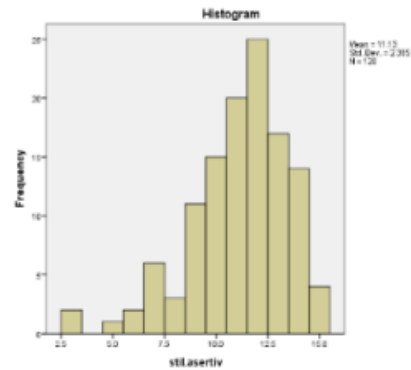


Figure 1.4. Histogram of simple frequencies – assertive style of teenagers

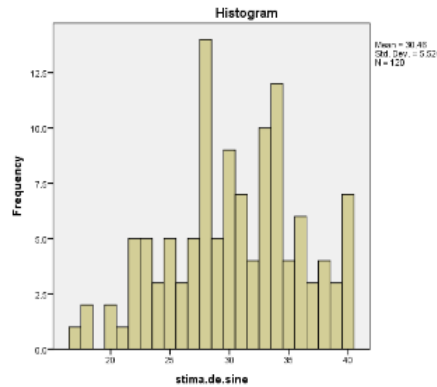


Figure 1.5. Histogram of simple frequencies- self-esteem of the teenagers

The application of the Spearman correlation test shows that at a significant threshold $p=0.01$, there is a negative medium correlation ($-0.6 < -0.501 < -0.4$) between self-esteem and non-assertive style and that at a significant threshold $p=0.01$ there is a positive medium correlation between self-esteem and assertive style ($0.00 < 0.391 < 0.4$)

Table 1.3. Correlations

			Non-assertive style	Aggressive style	Manipulative style	Assertive style	Self-esteem
Spearman's rho	Non-assertive style	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.415**	.106	-.428**	-.501**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.249	.000	.000
		N	120	120	120	120	120
	Aggressive style	Correlation Coefficient	-.415**	1.000	.280**	.204*	.146
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.002	.026	.112
		N	120	120	120	120	120



	N	120	120	120	120	120
Manipulative style	Correlation Coefficient	.106	.280**	1.000	-.182*	-.082
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.249	.002	.	.047	.371
	N	120	120	120	120	120
Assertive style	Correlation Coefficient	-.428**	.204*	-.182*	1.000	.391**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.026	.047	.	.000
	N	120	120	120	120	120
Self-esteem	Correlation Coefficient	-.501**	.146	-.082	.391**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.112	.371	.000	.
	N	120	120	120	120	120

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The obtained correlation can be noticed in the below graphic representations.

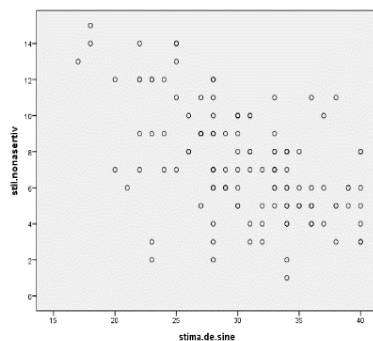


Figure 1.6. Scatter dot of the correlation between self-esteem and non-assertive style

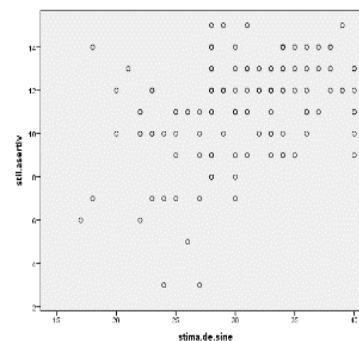


Figure 1.7. Scatter dot of the correlation between self-esteem and assertive style

The analysis of the data shows that the assertive communication style of the teenagers correlates positively with the self-esteem of the teenagers while the nonassertive communication style of the teenagers correlates negatively with the self-esteem of the teenagers. The assertive communication is the skill of expressing positive and negative ideas in an open, honest and direct way. That is why it allows people, including teenagers, to assume the responsibility for themselves and their actions without judging or blaming the other people. The teenagers whose level of self-esteem is high will have more chances to behave in an assertive way.

Maria Sarkova, Maria Bacikova-Sleskova, Olga Orosova, Andrea Madarasova Geckova, Zuzana Katreniakova, Wim van den Heuve, Jitse P. van Dijk, the authors of a study published in „Journal of Applied Social Psychology” in January 2013 (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2012.00988.x> accessed on 05.04.2020) reached the same conclusion. The study explores the associations between the



assertive behaviour, well-being state and self-esteem of the teenagers. The lot of participants was made up of 1023 students (47% boys, 53% girls) from 18 schools of Kosice, Slovak Republic. The selected schools were in different neighbourhoods in Kosice so that the lot of the participants could be representative for the city. The selection was made by random and it took into account the sex and the age of the students. The age of the respondents was between 14 and 17. The data were collected from April to June 2011. The forms were completed by the respondents during their classes, two 45-minute classes, their teacher was not present, but the researcher was present. They used the two dimensions of the scales for the interpretation of the behaviour (distress and performance), two factors of the general questionnaire for health (depression/ anxiety and social disfunction) and the two factors of Rosenberg scale of self-esteem (positive self-esteem and negative self-esteem). It was found out that the more anxious the respondents felt in assertive situations, the less they took part in such kind of situations and that both dimensions of the assertiveness were associated with the state of psychological well being and the self-esteem. The personality traits (extraversion and introversion), the psychological factors (social fears) or emotional factors (social self-esteem) were taken into account and they also contributed to a better understanding of the assertive behaviour. Another possible explanation could be the adaptation of the teenagers to social situations. The anxiety which they feel in assertive situations can be the same no matter how often they involve in them. Although they feel anxious, the association of the anxiety with the psychological wellbeing and self-esteem do not seem to rise according to the rising frequency of such situations. According to the discoveries of this study, we can consider that a rising of the teenagers' assertiveness will have significant positive consequences for the rising of their self-esteem and their wellbeing.

The assertiveness and self-esteem have a lot in common. Both of them are personality traits which are important and necessary to have a satisfactory life and healthy relationships with the others. The assertive teenagers develop trust and satisfaction in their capacity of interacting efficiently with people around them, teachers, parents and colleagues. When the teenagers have a high level of self-esteem, their level of assertiveness rises, which leads to the development of their potential to achieve successful results in future.

Hypothesis 2: It is assumed that there is a direct correlation between the self-esteem and the personality traits (extraversion, emotional stability and autonomy) of the high school teenagers aged between 15-17.

Table 2.1. Descriptives

Self-esteem	Mean	30.46	.504
	Median	30.50	
	Variance	30.519	
	Std. Deviation	5.524	
Extraversion	Mean	72.93	1.107
	Median	75.00	
	Variance	147.021	
	Std. Deviation	12.125	
Emotional stability	Mean	64.60	.973
	Median	66.00	
	Variance	113.519	
	Std. Deviation	10.655	



Autonomy	Mean	70.51	.956
	Median	71.50	
	Variance	109.664	
	Std. Deviation	10.472	

The start statistics indexes visible in the above table show the following values for the self-esteem: mean 30.46, median 30.50, variance 30.519 and std. deviation 5.524, for extraversion: mean 72.93, median 75.00, variance 147.021 and std. variation 12.195, for emotional stability: mean 64.60, median 66.00, variance 113.519 and std. deviation 10.655, for autonomy: mean 70.51, median 71.50, variance 109.664 and std. deviation 10.472.

Table 2.2. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Self-esteem	.086	120	.031	.978	120	.050
Extraversion	.084	120	.036	.968	120	.006
Emotional stability	.107	120	.002	.968	120	.006
Autonomy	.062	120	.200*	.990	120	.566

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Normal distributions have been obtained ($\text{sig} < 0.05$), thus non parametric method of comparison has been applied (Spearman).

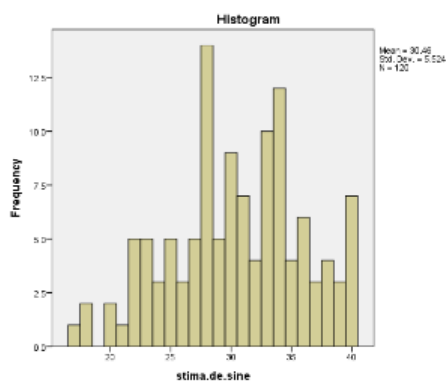


Figure 2.1. Histogram of simple frequencies- self-esteem

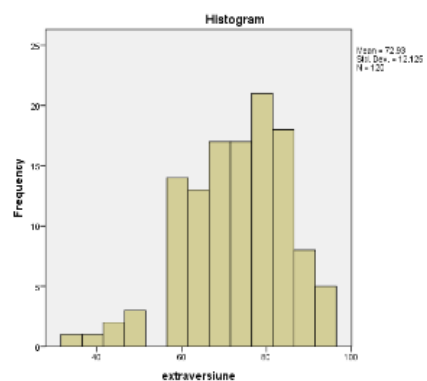


Figure 2.2. Histogram of simple frequencies- extraversion

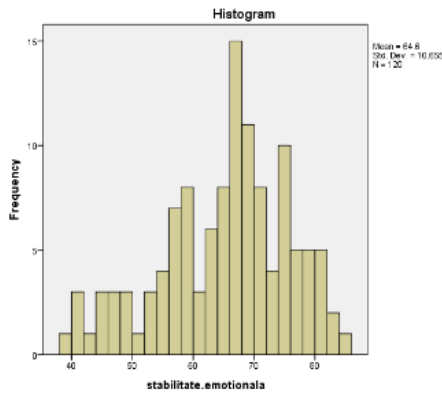


Figure 2.3. Histogram of simple frequencies- emotional stability

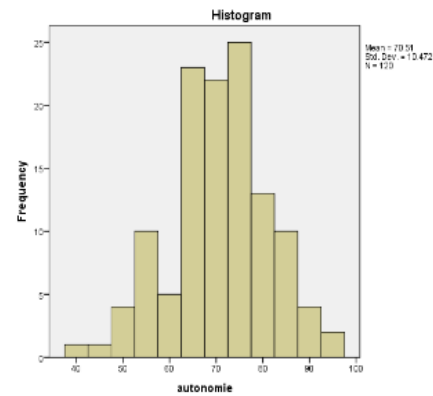


Figure 2.4. Histogram of simple frequencies- autonomy

The application of Spearman correlation test shows that at a significant threshold $p = 0.01$, there is a medium positive correlation ($0.4 < 0.433 < 0.6$) between self-esteem and emotional stability of the teenagers, a weak positive correlation ($0 < 0.310 < 0.4$) between the self-esteem and the extroversion of the teenagers and a weak positive correlation ($0 < 0.273 < 0.4$) between self-esteem and autonomy of the teenagers.

Table 2.3. Correlations

			Self-esteem	Extraversion	Emotional stability	Autonomy
Spearman's rho	Self-esteem	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.310**	.433**	.273**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001	.000	.003
		N	120	120	120	120
	Extraversion	Correlation Coefficient	.310**	1.000	.342**	.466**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.	.000	.000
		N	120	120	120	120
	Emotional stability	Correlation Coefficient	.433**	.342**	1.000	.464**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	120	120	120	120
	Autonomy	Correlation Coefficient	.273**	.466**	.464**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.000	.
		N	120	120	120	120

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The obtained correlation can be noticed in the below graphic representations.

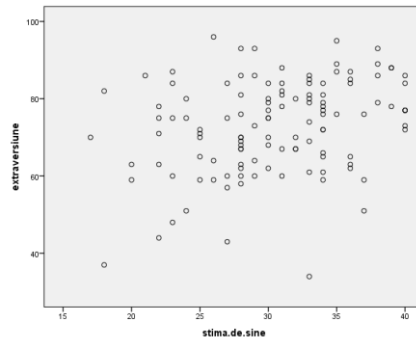


Figure 2.5. Scatter dot of the correlation between self-esteem and extraversion

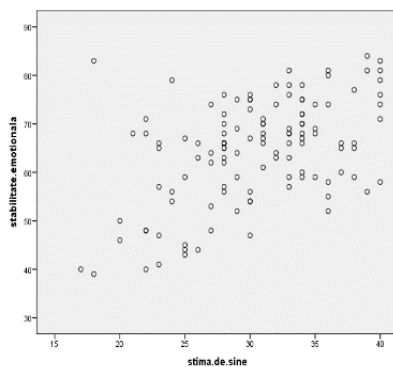


Figure 2.6. Scatter dot of the correlation between self-esteem and emotional stability

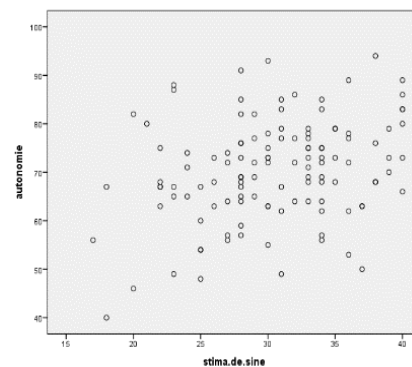


Figure 2.7. Scatter dot of the correlation between self-esteem and autonomy

The analysis of the data has proved that the self-esteem of the teenagers correlates with the following personality traits: extraversion, emotional stability and autonomy. Self-esteem remains mainly stable along the span of life thanks to the necessity of coherence and inner stability. Self-esteem and personality traits are significant for the development of identity. Moreover, as the temperament is inborn, a great deal of the variance of self-esteem is explained by the genetic differences. On the other hand, the temperamental characteristics influence decisively the behavioural tendencies of people. Besides, self-esteem and personality influence each other which means that the types of behaviour influence self-evaluation and self-esteem, which on its turn, has an important role in the way of approaching the situations. A teenager with a low level of self-esteem cannot have the trust to involve in a variety of social behaviours and so he becomes introvert.

Extraversion refers to sociability, openness to experience and optimism. The teenagers with a high level of self-esteem are trustworthy on their own skills of communication and on the success of their efforts when they try new things. Emotional stability contains personality traits such as: calm, relaxation and recreation. The teenagers with a high level of self-esteem do not feel fear in critical moments, act with calm and pass over difficult situations much easily than those who have a weak level of self-esteem.

The authors of the study "Personality traits and self-esteem, Fatemeh Amirazodi and Maryam Amirazodi- the study which was presented at the International Conference of Education and Educational Psychology, Shiraz University from Iran- (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042811027571> accessed on 10.04.2020) have proved, like our research, that self-esteem correlates with personality traits.



The lot of participants were 310 students from Siraz (147 girls and 163 boys), who were selected at random from different colleges from Siraz. The average age was 18. The scale of the Big Five factors of personality and the self-esteem scale of Coopersmith were used as questionnaires for this study. The results of the study have shown that the relationship between the personality traits and self-esteem such as, extraversion against introversion, amiability against antagonism, consciousness against lack of direction were the significant positive predictors and neuroticism versus emotional stability was a significant negative predictor for self-esteem. The traits associated to extroverts are: friendly, expressive, energetic and dominant, while the traits of inferior order are: social inhibition or shyness (feelings of discomfort in social interactions), sociability and level of energy/ activity. The conscientiousness refers to the level to which a person works to achieve their objectives in a laborious, disciplined and trustworthy manner. Thus, agreeable people are characterized as being useful, trustworthy and simple while the conscientious people are hard-working and self-disciplined. The openness about the type of personality is characterized by traits such as: imaginative, creative and aesthetic sensibility, fast capacity of learning and intelligence. On the other hand, the power, the responsibility in public field, receiving the help, high autonomy are characteristics of people with high level of self-esteem. In conclusion, the positive effect of extraversion, amiability, consciousness and openness to self-esteem is proved. Moreover, neurotic people are anxious, vulnerable to stress, frustrated, prone to feeling guilty and insecure in their relationships and their level of self-esteem correlates negatively with suffering and depression. In this way the negative relationship between neuroticism versus emotional stability and self-esteem is proved. Consequently, the Big Five factors of personality correlate with self-esteem.

Conclusions

Assertiveness is the result of a set of skills and behaviours which can be learnt and lead to the improvement of the social relationships, the development of self-confidence, the respect for personal rights, the formation of a healthy life style and the improving of the skills necessary for taking responsible decisions in life. If the skills which the assertiveness supposes do not form and develop during the adolescence, people will experiment trouble in communication, in expressing their own opinions and feelings later, in their adult life.

Assertive communication helps teenagers to improve their social skills and avoid failures in social experiences. If the teenagers become assertive, they will not have the feelings of uselessness of expressing their own points of view, they will not have an aggressive or passive attitude to the challenges of their environment. On the other hand, the deficiencies of assertiveness will have consequences not only on the development of their personality and their relationships with their families but also on their academic results and professional activity. That is the reason why the teachers and the educational counsellors should involve in the effort to develop the assertive communication with students, they should be open-minded when the students express their views and more than that, they should implement training programs which help teenagers to become assertive.

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