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Aggression among Children – Family-driven Determinants and Manners of its Prevention

Analysis of the Concept of Aggressive Behaviour

Aggressive behaviour, referred to as aggression, has been the subject of studies, observations and analyses of specialists of various scientific fields and spheres of social life. Psychologists, sociologists, educationalists together with layers, educators and organisers of social life have been interested in this phenomenon. This is the cause of difficulties in the unequivocal formulation of aggressive behaviour which would be accepted by all the interested experts and specialists.

From the perspective of psychology, aggression stands for a certain type of actions performed by people. Human actions, especially taking place during interpersonal contacts, are specific taking into consideration motivation and its character which underlie them, as well as effects which they cause together with moral and social values attributed to them. Differences in the definition of aggression by psychologists and disputes around the concept are basically brought down to that which of the listed criteria dominates in its specification (cf. Skorny, 1993).

In accordance to the motivational-emotional criterion, the essential feature of aggressive behaviour refers to specific motivation distinguishing it from other types of actions and activities. It is reflected in that aggressors demonstrating

willingness to do harm and destroy, intention to inflict damage on people, hurt, cause pain, distress in their experiencing emotions of anger, irritation, hostility, and hatred in relation to people who are the subject of aggression. It is assumed, therefore, that aggressive behaviour is activated and controlled by negative emotions and its intention is to harm, hurt, distress other people (cf. Ranschburg, 1993; Aronson, 2009).

An alternative criterion for the definition of aggressive behaviour is located within the sphere of its socially harmful consequences (objectively observed, measured, recorded). Subjective intentions to do harm or damage which stimulate feelings of anger, jealousy, hatred is not then the essential component of aggressive behaviours which accompany them or facilitate their occurrence. In this perspective, aggression is generated by such actions which cause body injuries, destruction of inanimate objects, devastation of the environment and which lead to pain, distress, humiliation of dignity, formulation of negative opinions, inhibition of activities conducted so far. Aggressive operations may cause or do cause suffering and harm (materially, morally) of people towards whom they are directed (cf. Wojciszke, 2003).

A third condition which should be taken into account in the specification, differentiation and definition of aggression as a specific class of interpersonal behaviours refers to the criterion of moral and social valuation. Aggressive behaviours as all actions taking place in interactions between people are subject to their assessment from the point of view of socially acceptable norms. Such moral and social valuation applied to define human actions requires consideration which behaviours are useful, desirable and which undesirable and harmful (socially). Kosewski (1977) is of opinion that “angry” aggression derived from emotions of anger, irritation is usually assessed negatively and treated as undesirable phenomena. Then actions which temporarily bring pain, suffering, injury to others (but they are justified by social

reasons) and in their further consequences they turn out to be useful and valuable for individuals, lead to positive effects, tend to be regarded to be acceptable and desirable although in fact they are of aggressive nature. So, taking into account social circumstances at which aggression occurs, Frączek (1975, p. 41) treats aggression in interpersonal relations as *such actions leading to suffering, damage, injury which are not justified by that they are useful, valuable for a particular individual or social group in their further consequences*.

There are also definitions which take into account three criteria of aggressive behaviour: intentionality, its consequences and social circumstances related to social norms and values. Aggression is then an action activated and controlled by anger and motivation to harm other people (the motivational-emotional criterion) which results in suffering and injury of attacked victims (the criterion of social consequences) but its recognition as aggressive operation is related to the analysis of social circumstances (within which aggression occurs) connected with social standards (the criterion of moral and social valuation) (cf. Toeplitz-Winiewska, 1980).

Generally speaking, the psychological literature provides three manners of understanding aggression.

Identification of Aggression and its Objectives among Children

Aggressive behaviours are undoubtedly often conducted for a particular objective. It is not asked why aggressive behaviour occurred but for what reason it occurred. These aims can be varied, for example fulfilment of specified needs, achievement of certain benefits, release of tensions or escape from threats. Special attention should be turned to the children-oriented objectives proposed by Poraj (2002).

Among young children with the participation of adults, **aggression appears as a fight in game**. Its aim is to try

out one's strength and to experience joy derived from victory. Parents encourage young children to play in which elements of fighting occur. They provide them with information that their aggression-driven behaviour is normal and accepted. Children introduce it to their repertoire of behaviours and shift it to beyond-family situations. Fighting in a game is usually a masculine play between fathers and sons. During fights fathers turn out to be weaker rivals as they surrender allowing children to win, who feel a sense of natural joy derived from victory. Children will provoke their parents to face further consequences; they will actively seek occasions to check their capabilities at fighting. Every time they win and build their confidence in their invincible physical strength. This is false knowledge on themselves and children do not know about it. In the course of time, fathers can be replaced by brothers, friends or other children. They can treat such games as factual attacks and will defend as much as they are able to. They will fight authentically with unpleasant consequences to follow (although it was supposed to be a game only).

Aggression also appears in games with military toys, mainly for boys. Children master their fighting skills and get used to aggressive behaviours and later shift them to other situations (beyond playing). The same happens in case of widespread computer games among children and adolescents where they fight with animated enemies and kill them. Characters endowed with more than one life are the paradox of such games. Such situations provide false information on the consequences of killing. If a game goes out of the world of fantasy, it can lead to a disaster. Both military toys and games teach children aggression as habitual behaviour in difficult situations.

Aggression as a reaction to frustration is to compensate harms and injuries. Aggression understood in this manner is treated as the retaliation for suffered humiliation. It occurs at the threat of one's own self-image, personal dignity or self-

esteem. Attack is a manner of raising one's respect. Pupil's aggression when experiencing school failures can be easily imagined. Teachers usually punish pupils for lack of learning effects and improper response to these punishments. Then, pupils' attack should be understood as a result of their failures caused by anger and irritation.

Aggression as an "enquiry" with the view to determine the boundaries what children are allowed to do. It appears at places where there are no clearly defined boundaries of what is permissible and what is forbidden. One of the typical manifestations of it concerns forcing parents by young children to purchase toys. Such children want to have a toy and if parents do not want to purchase it, they launch the whole arsenal of manners of enforcement: crying, screaming, stamping, pulling, kicking, throwing to the ground and descending into hysteria. Then purchasing it is the easiest way to silence them. When their behaviour brings the results they wish (the toy is purchased), children learn that their conduct is effective. In this case, adults give consent for their undesirable behaviours. If parents start making attempts to correct the behaviour of their child, the battle begins. Children are reluctant to abandon the position of dominance and power over their parents.

Aggression as a hidden desire for love is to attract interest, love, and support from their immediate surroundings. A search for interest through socially disfavoured behaviours which however bring popularity of the person (people) concerned, can be observed at home. Home is the area which often manifests itself in a lack of interest towards children. Parents who are busy with their work forget that there are children to be cared for at home. Children react diversely to this situation. In some cases when children do something wrong, parents turn their attention to it. Of course, their attention is of specific type as it concerns punishment. However, they prefer the interest of their parents which is connected with punishment to their

total indifference and ignorance (often experienced by them). As it turns out, children's aggression stands for an attempt to express their needs of more attention and interest or their disapproval of constant parents' absence.

At the end of this part of the discussion it is easy to notice that the identification and analysis of the objectives of aggression make it possible to understand their behaviour. Motivation is, as it can be seen, the important determinant of aggressive behaviour.

Family-driven Determinants of Aggression

Family-driven determinants of aggression can be divided into two groups. The first group of family-based factors generating children's aggression refers to a style of family up-bringing. Parents' aggression also contributes to children's aggression and belongs to the second group.

Children's Aggression Resulting from a Style of Family Upbringing

A number of researchers point to a family as the major source of determinants of aggressive behaviours (cf. Borecka-Biernat, 2013, Wałęcka-Matyja 2013). Efforts have been made to seek its causes in upbringing impacts of family-based environments, in particular in specific forms of parental upbringing influences towards children, namely, in emotional relations of parents towards them, requirements set towards their behaviour and types of reinforcements applied. These basic and most significant forms of upbringing influences within their interactions determine style of family upbringing (cf. Przetacznikowa, 1980). A variety of definitions of the concept of a style of family upbringing are provided in the literature. Among numerous attempts to define it, the definition made by Pluta (1979) deserves attention as it lists all the relevant elements of a standard upbringing situation. A style of family upbringing, according to the author (op. cit., p. 44), is expressed in *a specific, relatively stable relation-*

ship of a educator towards a pupil, in manners of conduct and enforcement of imposed obligations.

The study results concerning the issue of aggression show that inappropriate emotional relations in a family, emotional lack of parents' interest, clear emotional conflicts between a child and parents significantly favour the formation of spontaneous aggression filled with emotions manifesting in the form of violent acts by children. Such negative parents' conduct does not satisfy child's basic needs for emotional contacts, parental love, security and acceptance. Such deprivation of children's psychological needs and excessive coldness in interpersonal relations will lead to the formation of their hostile attitude towards people and the world. The studies made by Bandura and Walters (1968) clearly show that failure to fulfil needs for dependency and no emotional relations lead to increased aggressiveness of their responders. Long-term failure to fulfil needs for emotional dependency prevents children to get identified with norms and attitudes of their parents. As a result, there is no internalisation of mechanisms of internal control (aggressive impulses) whereby child's aggression can easily be manifested directly (cf. Liberska, Matuszewska, 2001). It will be characterised by its extensive tendency to get strengthened – as some authors state (cf. Pospiszyl, 1970) – thanks to its cathartic properties. Thanks to aggressive acts people release a lot of emotional tensions, which – when experiencing outbursts of aggression – are felt as rather pleasant states what in turn leads to their strengthening. Aggressive catharsis is the existing emotional experience which is accompanied by a feeling of relief and calmness. Then an act of aggression is awarded in an immediate manner. Aggressive behaviour which temporarily reduces tension is a rewarding factor and thus strengthening an aggressive manner of reaction. Under the influence of temporary relief at each and every frustrating situation children will look for an opportunity to demonstrate aggression as they have already experienced that

in certain situations that brought them relief (cf. Ranschburg, 1993). Children have already known that aggression is a good manner to get gratification and scores a motive for aggression. In general, the cathartic effect is very short-term and allows them to run away from suppressive frustrations and conflicts just for a short time while the very causes of life difficulties are left intact.

The literature also provides evidence that parents' tolerance of aggressive behaviours of their children is an equally important cause of aggression at children. This tolerance can take a form of allowance for aggressive behaviours, not for punishment for them or their encouragement. Such parents' conduct does not contribute to the development of children's abilities to control their own aggressive impulses or reactions. The research made by Olweus (1980), Kirwil (1992) show that aggressive behaviours rewarded at home, permissive or encouraging attitude of adults in relation to children's open aggression in later periods increase chances of application of aggression by them in other interactional situations. It means that a level of aggression at children towards their peers, siblings and adults will increase as it is confronted with indulgence or acceptance on behalf of their parents. Upbringing without strengthening child's control over emotions, no postponement of gratification, yielding to demands made by children, tolerance of manifestations of tyranny on their part, all of these called "spoiling upbringing" lead to increased aggression (cf. Obuchowska, 2001). If children are over-protected, the following "spoiled child"-typed behaviours often occur: excessive self-confidence, a sense of higher value, vanity which sometimes mask uncertainty or anxiety. Such children are also generally exposed to threats, failures and difficulties, because they are not trained to overcome these types of situations. Protective parents by rewarding dependent behaviours inhibit children to acquire abilities to cope independently with

different social contexts and foster the creation of child's low tolerance to frustration (cf. Plopa, 1984). Therefore, children become strongly dependant on adults, they have got no sense of their abilities and capabilities to act. They just rely on their caregivers. They are perceived as more and more helpless in life, indecisive and little mentally resistant persons.

Over-protected children face a lot of difficult situations due to their lack of independence, resourcefulness and emotional independence. As a result they tend to be obstinate, nervous, and negatively-oriented towards surrounding people (their surroundings). And thus being always privileged in family situations, they get into conflicts in beyond-family situations (at school) at which peer-to-peer relations apply; they find it hard to understand that they do not deserve special consideration from their peers (surroundings), that they are not required to comply with group standards, fulfil obligations derived from their group membership and perceive needs of others. These children – feeling disadvantaged and unfairly treated – often resort to aggression believing that their behaviour will lead to increased interest in them and allow to achieve their goals. If their behaviour brings the results they expect (gaining interest and support from their surroundings), they learn that aggression is an effective manner to overcome difficulties. Children will often try out the manner and if they find it effective, the behaviour will strengthen and enter the repertoire of their conduct. As Wojciszke (2003) declares, aggression will increase and strengthen when it leads to getting a reward. It can include external awards, referring to their social status, recognition of others or other assets. The important role is also played by internal, psychological awards. It considers children's increased self-esteem, a sense of control over particular situations and power over others.

Pospiszyl (1976), Lachowska (1986), Pawłowska (1991), Pielkova (1997), Dutkiewicz (2003) – by examining aggres-

sive behaviours in the context of upbringing environments – proved that the application of upbringing techniques (methods) based on presenting predominance and emphasising power by parents significantly contribute to the formation of aggression among children. Parents of aggressive children primarily apply severe corporal penalties, making fun, nagging, scolding, deprivation of privileges, pleasures and objects with their severity rapidly decreasing as children grow and quite rarely apply penalties based on emotions (threat of loss of emotions, feelings, silence) the intensity of which increase in relation to older children. All these techniques, both verbal (scolding, reprimanding, rebuking) and physical (beating, tapping) are generally linked with higher levels of aggression at both boys and girls. In most cases, bad school grades, disobedience and verbal aggression were the cause of punishing children characterised by a high level of aggressive behaviours. It is worth noticing that parental upbringing discipline based on rewards is the least popular. Parents of aggressive children make use of material rewards to a minor extent, more often applying praise as a form of positive strengthening for their “exceptional” behaviour. In fact, most parents claim that the application of rewards is not an appropriate upbringing practice. They often express their opinion that good behaviour is a “child’s obligation” and only child’s “exceptional” upbringing should be rewarded. Thus, the application of physical punishments, bawling and shouting strengthen aggressive behaviours. Punishment as an aggression-generating factor can be considered in terms of launching two fundamental mechanisms of aggression: frustration and modelling. The mechanism of frustration operates not only in case of failure to fulfil security, emotional contact and independence needs, but also in case of inappropriate reinforcements, especially frequent use of physical punishments. The empirical material obtained by Menecka (1998) shows that severe punishments inflicted by parents do harm to children

causing pain, lowering their self-assessment, arousing fear, desire for revenge and obstinacy towards punishers. The application of punishments is also considered to be a source of aggression modelling. Parents punishing children often are not perceived by them as aggressive persons; frequent punishing forms a model of aggressive behaviours at children. Severe punishments cause the pass-on of patters of aggressive behaviours in relationships with people to children, promote patterns of aggressive behaviours, teach them to defend their causes with the use of force, leading to shift aggressive reactions to other people (cf. Zimbardo, Gerrig, 2005).

At the end of this part of the discussion it is noticeable that the formation of aggression is linked with the presence of upbringing style components applied in a family. The discussed studies have shown that an aggressive behaviour is formed in case of upbringing situations at which there are inappropriate emotional relationships between children and parents, there is no emotional interest on their part or there are clear emotional conflicts between parents and children. Parents apply punitive disciplinary methods only. Rigorous upbringing conduct should be treated as a manifestation of parental aggression towards children which is a kind of pattern of behaviour which gets strengthened at them in the form of habitual reactions to other people, objects from their surroundings or task situations. Parents' tolerance of aggressive behaviours of their children is also a significant cause of the formation of aggression at children. Such tolerance can take a form of consent for aggressive behaviours, their encouragement, or lack of punishment for them. Overall, the presented research works indicate two defective family environments generating aggression: a cold, indulgent family characterised by hostility, lack of child's acceptance, lack of specified orders and expectations, punishment as the main manner of influencing child's behaviour and on the other hand, a warm, limiting family approving children

unconditionally, excluding child's independence rarely applying physical punishments and often praising.

Children's Aggression as a Result of the Modelling Impact of Parents

In numerous situations, human behaviours depend not only on the characteristics of situations to be responded, but also on the manner of other people's behaviours in these situations. A concept of modelling refers to the process of learning of behaviours through observations of other person's (model's) behaviours. This is learning through observations, learning by means of examples, so-called social learning aimed to imitate of other people's behaviours (cf. Poznaniak, 2000).

The impact of family upbringing is achieved through conscious activities but also through unconscious actions by means of family patterns of behaviour. A family is an abundant source of patterns of behaviours in different situations. Children imitate behaviours of people with whom they are emotionally connected. Parents play a crucial role in the process of modelling of child's behaviour (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1970). Parents form the grounds for the development of basic patterns or models of behaviour at children in their social surroundings. By identifying with parents, children try to behave in the manner they image their parents would behave in particular situations.

Children learn aggression as other behaviours not only based on their own experience but also by observing behaviours of other people and perceiving consequences to which they lead (cf. Wojciszke, 2003). Presence of aggressive people in families is the cause of aggression within their facility surroundings. The research developed by Rostowska (1996), Borecka-Biernat (2006) provided evidence that there are dependencies between parents' aggression and aggressive behaviours of their children. A large number of aggressive mothers and fathers constitutes unquestionable cause of aggressiveness of their children and duplication of the model of aggressive interactions by them.

Parents of aggressive children are seen by them as aggressive, preferring aggressive behaviours at their contact with children. It is worth noting that, as some authors (cf. Grochulska, 1993; Rostowska, 1996; Grochocińska, 1999; Bryłka, 2000) consider, the effectiveness of modelling intensifies in case parents apply punishments as negative reinforcements. The vast majority of parents of aggressive children include individuals preferring shouting or physical punishments in their upbringing. Fathers turned out to be more severally punishing people. They more often meted out punishments to boys than to girls. It was indicated that mothers manifested verbal violence against girls more often. Boys turned out to be more aggressive as they were punished more (and oftener). It should be emphasised that the application of punishments evokes reactions of anger, rebellion, protest, revenge at children and at the same time provides them with the model of patterns of aggressive behaviours. Physical aggression is more typical to boys, whereas verbal aggression to girls who learn it from their mothers. On the grounds of the presented empirical data it can be concluded that children can assimilate aggressive attitudes in case when their imitated models are aggressive. Psychological studies have confirmed that the majority of aggressive children come from families at which there is one aggressive parent or both of them. Parents who punish children are often perceived by them as aggressive people. Frequent application of punishments leads to the formation of the model of aggressive behaviours (cf. Wolińska, 2000). Therefore, aggressive behaviours towards children themselves (physical punishments) play relevant modelling role.

In addition to upbringing methods based on physical punishments at the generation of aggression and inappropriate relations between parents themselves are the major sources of aggressive behaviours of children. In terms of such modelling of aggressive behaviours by parents, mutual parents' relations should be taken under consideration. If they are dominated

by conflicts, quarrels, or bawling, then similar behaviours at children will be formed. If children observe aggressive relations of parents towards other people, for example neighbours, friends, or encountered people, then they will learn that this is the right way to respond to them. There is no doubt that children who watch aggressive scenes of their parents take on aggressive models of behaviour. Cywińska (2011) claims that aggressive forms of behaviours at children's conflicts are transferred from family conflicts which for children constitute negative patterns in this respect. Statements made by children at their school age indicate that parents become negative models manifesting numerous acts of aggression towards each other to a significant extent. Scenes of quarrels, fights, acts of malice in parents' relations motivate children to aggressive behaviours. It is worth highlighting that the model of aggressive family has an impact on the course of beyond-family children's relations. In quarrelsome families frequent quarrels or abrupt changes of action are taken on by children to follow. They apply these behaviours at their contacts with families or siblings and also shift them to school interactions, behave arrogantly towards teachers, are aggressive towards their peers.

When reinforced their exhibited aggressive behaviours can be positively strengthened and become their habit to attack. It is about direct reinforcements referring to learning people themselves and indirect (alternative) reinforcements – to model people. The “rewarding” of aggressive behaviours plays a significant role in their formation. If it is found that aggressive behaviours are effective, rewarded, lead to the fulfilment of needs, and it is quite a high probable that observers will imitate them hoping they will bring them gratification (Grochulska, 1993). It means that when children see their models receive specific rewards, i.e. they have got what they want and do not suffer any consequences or just little consequences, it encourages to imitate similar behaviours. As a result it causes strength-

ening of aggression as an effective manner of behaviour. At the same time, observed effective aggression, i.e. allowing to achieve any desired objective, penetrates children's personality forming a view that the world goes in this manner and either you are a winner (promoted by aggression) or a loser. The view that aggression is an effective manner to cope with difficulties and that objectives can be accomplished at all costs can be formed from one's early childhood (cf. Obuchowska, 2001). It has been found that harmful patterns of interactions called family enslaving named by Patterson commonly occur in families of aggressive children. Aggression there is used by both parents and children for the purposes of mutual control and achievement of objectives. Children take on aggressive forms of behaviours from their family surroundings and treat them as effective manners of solving problems, achieving objectives. The research conducted by Borecka-Biernat (2006) provided evidence that there are dependencies between parents and children in the range of preferred-by-them manners of coping with difficult situations. It is concluded on the grounds of the research that mothers and fathers perceived applying strategies based on aggression contributory to the modelling of strategies consisting in aggressive behaviours and used in difficult social situations by young people. Another important result refers to a high level of aggressive strategies of coping in socially difficult situations by fathers. Regardless of whether mothers cope aggressively in difficult situations or not, it results in increased levels of aggression-based strategies of coping at girls and /or boys. It is also worthy of note that gender (sex) as models' feature which facilitates identification with them plays an important role under natural situations. So fathers have an impact on the formation of aggressive strategies at boys. They identify with fathers and most often a kind of identification with aggressors and imitation of their patterns of behaviour occur. In turn, a presumption is raised that the formation of

aggression-based coping strategies in a group of girls is impacted by the personal characteristics of fathers with whom they identify and not the gender compliance of models and identifying individuals (cf. Rychlak, Legerski, 1967).

On the basis of the presented empirical data it should be noted that aggressive behaviours of children in various life situations can be explained by the model of aggressive behaviours of their fathers and mothers. Children echo their parents and thus they learn to solve conflicts with the use of force, in particular of they observe positive results of their aggressive behaviour (cf. Aronson et. al., 2012). Summing up, a family is a place at which social learning of aggressive behaviours through modelling takes place. Aggressive behaviours at children are a form of learned conduct by observations and frequent contacts with people manifesting aggressive behaviours, i.e. models, most often parents.

Prevention of Aggression among Children

In view of the obvious dangers of aggression, the question is whether aggression can be stopped and if so, how? For a long time constructive manners of coping with aggression have been sought. Reduction of aggression and violence by means of legal methods failed. Some successes were achieved through methods referring to psychological knowledge and support. The manners which are pointed most often include punishment of aggression and elimination of aggression through the release of stimulation leading to aggression.

Punishment of Aggression

A punishment can be defined as follows: this is *a negative situation avoided by an individual and accompanied by an unpleasant emotional state* (cf. Mika, 1987, p. 380). Due to the increased availability and apparent ease of application of punishments, punishment of aggression is the most popular manner of coping with inappropriate behaviours of children

conducted mainly by parents. The role of punishment applied to prevent aggression is not clear. On one hand, punishment of aggressive behaviours reduces their intensity and frequency of their occurrence. On the other hand, since punishment usually takes a form of violence, people who try to eliminate aggression can – instead of achieving the objective – become models of aggressive behaviours and create conditions which are conducive to the process of modelling.

All the researchers dealing with aggression agree that rewards for aggressive behaviours cause their intensification; their major controversies focus around the issue of punishment of aggression and its effectiveness. Understanding the effectiveness of punishment by learning psychologists should be considered. Firstly, effectiveness of punishment is understood as any effects caused by punishment such as fear, escape from punishment, its avoidance. Secondly, it can be understood in this manner that punishments cause specific effects which are considered to be desirable. For example, through punishment it is expected to eliminate certain reactions, accelerate the process of terminating or learning certain reactions. Thirdly, by applying punishments, not only effects considered to be desirable are achieved but also effects considered to be undesirable are reached. Punishments should not lead to such undesirable effects at punished people as neurosis or negative attitudes to punishing people.

On the basis of the analysis of learning theory, three research hypotheses with various degrees of empirical verification on the effectiveness of punishments for aggression are set forth.

Punishments for Aggressive Behaviours are Ineffective, Little Effective or Even Harmful

The observation and analysis of children's behaviour in real life situations brought the researchers dealing with aggression to the conclusion on the ineffectiveness of punishments as techniques to control aggression (cf. Bandura, Walters, 1968; Pospiszyl,

1973). Punishments suppress punished reactions (aggression) but do not eliminate them. It also turns out that the cessation of punishment leads to recurrence of punished reactions (aggression). Punished aggressive behaviour is not eliminated if aggression is valuable for people behaving aggressively. Then punishment of children's aggressive behaviour who for example learned it as a manner to avoid disapproval of their peers brings a rise in aggressive acts (cf. Konarzewski, 1982). It should be emphasised that if aggressive behaviour is for aggressors more valuable and meaningful than punishment, aggression will not be eliminated or suppressed.

Additionally, Bandura and Walters (1968) consider that punishments are ineffective as they do not result in the termination of undesirable reactions (aggression). Moreover, they lead to two types of socially undesirable effects: firstly passing-on patterns of aggressive behaviours in interpersonal relations, and secondly shifting aggressive reactions to other people.

Moreover, Skinner (1995/1938) draws attention to the three most important undesirable effects of punishments:

- Application of punishment evokes a feeling of fear at punished people, which is a negative and harmful reaction as it lowers a level of response.
- Application of punishment evokes a feeling of conflict at punished people as it forces them to inhibit punished reactions; this conflict is a harmful state.
- Both intensely negative emotional states to which a feeling of fear belongs and conflicts can lead to neurotic disorders.

The effectiveness of punishments was tested by Hollenberg and Speery (following: Ranschurg, 1993). Under the influence of punishment a level of open aggression is reduced, however not permanently. Punishment of open aggression leads to frustration which produces new anger and new tendencies for aggressive reactions. Children feel that they are threatened

aggression but their inclination remains and is released in the form of symbolic aggression. Punishment can become a new source of aggression which – in the course of time – can be transformed into permanent patterns of behaviour.

Punishment for Aggressive Behaviours is Effective

The occurrence of such emotional states as anxiety, fear in the process of punishment makes the grounds to eliminate aggression or to make individuals to escape, avoid punishing stimuli (cf. Lefkowitz, Walder, Eron, 1974). Fear is the basis of learning of these activities by a person leading to its reduction, which is the reward for these activities. The application of punishments is effective as it eliminates punished actions. Punishments are important factors in the process of learning. Thanks to them people not only learn activities leading to the reduction of fear but can also internalise norms and social roles. It is doubtful that emotional states (anxiety, fear) accompanying punishment are harmful. It is believed that they are the basis thanks to which punishment is effective.

Punishment for Aggressive Behaviours is Effective in Certain Circumstances

Modifiers of the effectiveness of punishment for aggression is linked with the issue of punishments (a place of aggression in the hierarchy of reactions), punishments themselves (their character, strength, phase, consequence of application, frequency and proportion in reference to rewards), existing relations between punishing and punished people (attitudes, acceptance of standards, social status).

The effectiveness of punishment as a factor which inhibits aggressive behaviours depends on whether aggression is the only manner to achieve the intended purpose or one of several possible ones (cf. Buss, 1961; Berkowitz, 1968). If the intended purpose can be achieved by non-aggressive behaviours, then punishment

can be a method which effectively prevents aggression. This is especially true when punishment of aggressive behaviours is accompanied by rewarding of other instrumental behaviours which favour achieving the objective. When the objective can be achieved only through aggressive behaviours, objectively or in the concept of a particular individual (subjectively), then punishment inhibits it temporarily only, or can give rise to the shift of aggression. The effectiveness of punishment is conditioned by an indication of alternative responses to situations which cause children's aggression. Within their repertoire of behaviours they must have the whole range of reactions which are adequate responses to situations producing negative emotions.

Regardless of the characteristics of aggression, the effectiveness of punishment as means to eliminate aggressive behaviours or to reduce stimulation for aggression depends on a type of punishment. The empirical studies provide evidence that there are possible manners to eliminate and modify aggression through – apart from elements of physical punishment – other reinforcement techniques. Lefkowitz, Walder, Eron (1974) – upon getting acquainted with the experimental research – concluded that physical punishments are little effective to suppress aggression when compared with punishments involving deprivation of approval and love on behalf of relevant people. Physical punishment stimulates aggression and psychological punishment makes punished people internalise norms and values recognised by punishing others, evoking a sense of guilt. Physical forms of punishments through aggression are highly aggressive in nature and arouse negative emotions, therefore, their application can produce opposite effects in relation to the intended ones, for example physical punishment of children provides them with further patterns of aggressive behaviours.

The effectiveness of punishment as a factor inhibiting aggressive behaviours depends on the intensity of punishing stimuli.

62 Buss (1961) presents hypothetical dependencies (curvilinear

in nature) between the strength of punishment (understood as attack) directed at people and its response. In accordance with the principle, the author expects that low severe attacks do not trigger aggressive reactions, medium severe attacks are responded with intensive aggression, very severe attacks reduce the likelihood of counter-aggressive behaviours. According to the author aggression is hampered by punishments with their considerable severity; in this case they give rise to fear, anxiety and tendencies to escape. There is no doubt that as the severity of punishment grows, the probability of suppression of reactions for longer time periods increases; however it triggers higher levels of anxiety. The thesis on the effectiveness of severe punishments is confirmed by the research developed by Salomon (1964) and Parke, Walters (following: Frączek, 1975). The opposite to the above is presented by Lefkowitz, Walder, Eron (1974), Mika (1987) and Aronson et. al. (2012). They claim that the effectiveness of punishment is conditioned by its insignificant severity. Children punished most severely are most often aggressive.

A phase (moment) of behaviour at which punishment occurs has also got a significant impact on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of aggression prevention by means of punishment. The research results provided evidence that punishment taking place at the start of deviant actions which are to be eliminated leads to more effective inhibition of disfavoured behaviours than punishment occurring just upon the completion of these actions (cf. Poraj, 2002; Aronson et. al., 2012). In other words, it appears that the maximal suppression of undesirable reactions is usually achieved when punishment occurs just upon the start of aggression. The effect of suppression of undesirable behaviours is weaker when punishment appears upon the end of aggression. Punishment just upon misbehaving directs children to link imposed punishments with undesirable behaviours, while their postponement – for example taking a form of

parents' statements such as *When I come back home, I will get even with you* is not conducive to the elimination of aggressive behaviours (cf. Stach, 1989).

Punishment immediately upon the beginning of aggression directs children to link imposed punishments with their undesirable behaviours. Children get to know that every time when a similar behaviour occurs, punishment will follow. This inevitability of punishment effectively prevents the occurrence of aggressive reactions, but it is not widespread applied. Adults lack consequence, time and often postpone punishment. It releases children from their compliance with norms. Parents' reaction is violent, occurs in specific circumstances and leads to punishment for the whole of issues. Then punishments are not adequate to misdoings and give rise to a feeling of grievance at children. Unsteady, sporadic punishment is a relevant "co-trigger" of aggressive behaviours (cf. Berkowitz, 1968; Bandura, Walters, 1968). While conducting the research on the genesis of hooliganism of adolescent boys Pospiszyl (1970) stated that 70% of respondents behaving rowdy had grown up at homes at which parents exhibited parental inconsistency in their upbringing.

In order to achieve the elimination of aggressive behaviours punishments should not be quite frequent and should be accompanied with regularly frequent rewarding for pro-social behaviours (cf. Mika, 1987). The research results developed by Lefkowitz, Walder, Eron (1974) show that parents of aggressive children apply punishments only, focussing at undesirable behaviours, but do not facilitate them to develop non-aggressive behaviours through their rewarding. Low levels of parents' positive reactions towards children do not cause their increased aggressiveness but reduces the possibility of efficient application of punishments inhibiting aggressive behaviours. On the other hand, when punishment of aggression is accompanied by rewarding of alternative manners of behaviour, aggression

Mutual relationships between punishing and punished people significantly determine the effectiveness of punishments. It is higher when punished people have a positive attitude towards punishing people than when their relationships are of negative nature. According to Becker (1964), Aronson (2009), the effectiveness of punishments by mothers linked emotionally with children is higher than by mothers with their cold emotional attitude. Mothers applying physical punishments not only revealed severer hostility towards children but also more often insisted on them to fight for their rights in conflicts with peers, even with the use of force. The negative attitude of parents towards children co-determines the negative attitude of children towards parents, which leads to the ineffectiveness of punishments to eliminate inappropriate behaviours. In this case punishments are not a carrier of information on the inappropriateness of behaviours and the need for their correction, but acts of aggression and revenge leading consequently to the intensification of aggression at children. Sears, Macoby and Lewin (following: Mika, 1987) present the issue otherwise. These authors, analysing the research results over various manners of children's upbringing by parents, state that there are many more mothers who often applying physical punishments and considering them to be effective keep warm emotional relationships with punished children. In contrast, little effects are brought by physical punishments according to mothers who keep cold emotional relationships with their children. The authors explain that children who are beaten by their mothers that love them are doubly penalised. At first they feel physical pain; then, they perceive interruption of good emotional relationships with mothers, whereas children who keep cold emotional relationships with parents are singly penalised as they suffer physical pain only and cannot lose good emotional bond with mothers as there is none. It follows from the above that physical punishments applied by mothers keeping their positive attitude towards children are

more effective than punishments applied by mothers keeping cold relations with them. In the first case, two negative reinforcements, i.e. beating and love interruption are introduced. It turns out that 66% of mothers keeping their warm attitude towards children consider physical punishments to be effective in comparison with 43% of them keeping no positive relations with children. So the effectiveness of physical punishments is conditioned by cordial, positive attitudes of punishing people towards punished people.

In general, it can be said that punishment for aggression can result in various consequences, depending on a number of factors, often unexpected ones, as they increase aggression rather than hamper it.

Aggressive Catharsis

The hypothesis of catharsis assumes releasing of stimulation (physiological and emotional tensions) which generates aggression through performing acts of aggression. As a result of aggression stimulation and chances of further aggressive behaviour would decrease. The existing data show quite fairly that a level of physiological tension experienced by aggressors (provoked to be aggressive) drops as a result of conducted aggression. Acts of aggression partially or totally reduce diastolic blood pressure to its pre-provocation level, which in turn lead to increased pressure. However, aggression has got such consequences when directed at provocateurs only – not at other people – so no cathartic effect of transferred aggression was stated (cf. Geen, Quanty, 1977).

The research on the impact of an act of aggression on its further range at the same perpetrator yielded the opposite results. Most of the experiments in which respondents were provoked to hostile statements on victims showed that such provocation led to their more hostile attitude to victims compared to respondents who did not speak hostilely on victims

(cf. Ebbesen, Duncan, Konečni, 1975). Respondents who previously inflicted other people with pain were of worse opinion about them (they like them less and attribute more negative features to them) than respondents who did not have any opportunity to physical aggression (cf. Geen, Quanty, 1977). Numerous studies indicate that a level of aggression not only decreases but in fact increases at multiple repetitions of physical aggression directed towards the same person.

The data on auxiliary catharsis which stands for releasing stimulation through other (than aggression) tension-reductive actions correlate with these results. The following are pointed most often: physical activities (running, pounding a punching bag), participation in sports games and cheering at sports competitions, watching acts of violence, games with elements of violence or fantasies on violence. Auxiliary catharsis is covered by a relatively small number of studies, however experiments have shown that aggressive fantasies directed at provocateurs do not cause any return of physiological tensions to their pre-provocation levels and physical exercises, sports activities requiring fierce competition or watching sports competition lead to increased (rather than decreased) aggression (cf. Patterson, 1974; Geen, Quanty, 1977; Russell, 1983).

Overall, the presented studies suggest that performing any act of aggression causes a drop of physical and emotional tension and brings a pleasant relief which is the reason for faith in the effectiveness of catharsis (in accordance with the hypothesis on catharsis) but increases tendencies for further aggression against the same victim and this is a completely ineffective manner to stop further aggression which is contrary to the hypothesis catharsis.

Techniques to Cope with Anger among Children

It is hard to live a day without experiencing frustration, irritation, anger and not to become a participant in conflicts.

Feeling anger is a normal phenomenon. So children – apart from other emotions – also experience it. Fischer and his colleagues (1990) think that anger arises in situations in which unjust threats or obstacles to achieve one's intentions are perceived. People are not born endowed with knowledge about methods to release anger (emerging within them) in a constructive manner without resorting to violence. Unfortunately, all too often aggression is a behavioural manifestation of anger aimed to cause harm to somebody or something. Children find it more difficult to express anger in socially acceptable manners. They are prone to verbal and physical harassment or anti-social behaviour such as breaking regulations, school dropouts, etc.

One of the manners to prevent aggression refers to teaching/training children in the scope of constructive expression of anger, negotiations and seeking compromises when conflicts arise. The data supporting the role of trainings of social skills in preventing aggressive behaviours (Aronson et. al., 2012) were collected. It turned out that children who previously underwent training on teamwork (group interactions) skills, upon experiencing frustration, reacted much more rationally and demonstrated less aggression.

It is important to realise that there is a fundamental difference between experiencing feeling of anger and expressing it through aggression. To cope with this emotional reaction, attempts can be made to suppress it. Restraining can sometimes help to control anger better, however persistent restraint leads to outbursts of anger, which if restrained, can even be caused by a minimal incentive. Suppression of intensive negative emotions can be a source of physical diseases, somatic disorders, symptoms of mental diseases or negative emotions that climax in the form of attacks of extreme violence. There are forms of expressing anger which are not connected to applied aggression. One of them is to communicate to the person who evoked it or other person (the surroundings) that you are

angry and to give the reason(s) for your bad mood. The recognition of one's anger relieves experienced tensions and improves mood. At the same time it does not start cognitive processes aimed to devaluate (depreciate) the object of aggression as without hurting the other person we do not have to justify our behaviour. Statements concerning our experienced negative feelings strengthen mutual understanding and promote to establish close relationships between and among people. The best option is to pass information on our anger to the person who causes it. Sharing our negative feelings with someone else can also be beneficial. J. Pennebaker (following: Aronson, et. al. 2012) thinks that the expression of one's own feelings is not only related with emotional release but also facilitates to realise one's felt discomfort and take an insight into one's own mental processes.

Vlachopoulos (2013) points to interesting techniques by which adults (parents, teachers, educators) can help children in their coping with anger. According to the author's findings the following belong to a group of constructive manners of coping with anger by children: 1. Conversations of adults with children on their emotions – providing them with information that there is no one to blame and everyone accounts for dealing with it. 2. Provision of support to children who try to understand and control their anger, even if adults do not approve their behaviours. 3. Assistance given to children to express their anger in a positive manner – learning them to say for example: “when my fellow-friend say or do something, I feel anger” and not: “I hate my fellow-friend”. 4. Inhibition and control of anger through non-aggressive manners of releasing it, for example by drawing or writing negative thoughts/feelings at pieces of paper and then destroying them. 5. Being a good model for children in coping with one's own anger. Behaviours demonstrated by relevant people are absorbed by observing children. It should be highlighted here that effective coping with anger by children is

a form of learned behaviour through observations and frequent contacts with people manifesting such behaviours (as a result of impacts of behavioural models). The research conducted by Baron (1972), Aronson et al. (2012) showed that children participating in the experiments watched their peers who are in situations which could evoke anger, could inhibit aggression and in spite of provocations they behaved reasonably, politely and kept control of their reactions. Subsequently, these children were provoked to manifest aggressive behaviours. It turned out that children who had previously been provided with patterns of non-aggressive behaviours in provocative situations reacted aggressively much less frequently than children who had not been provided with these patterns.

Concluding the deliberations on the manners of prevention of aggression among children it should be noted that the role of punishment in the generation of restraints hindering aggression is not clear. Punishment for aggression can lead to various consequences depending on a number of factors. Moreover, there are no data found to support the existing phenomenon of catharsis consisting in the reduction of aggressive tendencies through conducting acts of aggression or observations of aggression at other people. The research proved their inverse relation. Acts of aggression trigger the cognitive process aimed to justify one's actions. It increases the likelihood of subsequent acts of aggression. The effective manner to prevent aggressive reactions at children turned out to be undertaking actions directed at the elimination of feelings of anger. They include, among others, exercises of communication competences and skills of conducting negotiations or peaceful resolution of conflicts and notification on one's anger.

The considerations conducted in this chapter lead to the following conclusion: remedial solutions can be multiplied with their effectiveness in the reduction of aggression described, but it is worth being aware that it is better to prevent aggression

than to remedy it. The key role in the life of children is played by kind and self-controlled people who pass on active patterns of behaviour being a solution for the prevention of aggression and effective coping with anger. Children need loving and security-ensuring families in which they can observe behaviours of parents who effectively cope with anger. ■