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### Investigating the impact of assertiveness training on assertiveness and Self-esteem of High School students

**Abstract:** *Aim: This study investigates the impact of assertiveness training on assertiveness and self-esteem of high school students. Method: The study employs Quasi-experimental design where 130 participants aged 13-17 years were selected randomly and assigned into two groups as experimental (N-65) and control group (N-65). Tools: For this aim Assertiveness scale (AS) and Self-esteem questionnaire (RSE) were used. Training: During the treatment phase, the experimental group received assertiveness training of 5 weeks comprising two sessions per week, and each session took 45 minutes. After treatment both experimental and control groups are measured with post-tests. Results: The results show that assertiveness training has significantly increased the assertiveness and decreased the aggression and submission in the experimental group. Also the training has significantly increased the self-esteem of students. Conclusion: The obtained findings revealed an increase in the rate of self-esteem and assertiveness and decrease in the aggression and submission of students. Hence it proved that assertiveness training is significantly effective on the assertiveness, aggression, submission and self-esteem of students.*

**Keywords:** *self-esteem, students, aggression, assertiveness, Submission*

#### Background of the study

Adolescence is the crucial stage in one's life between childhood and adulthood. It is a stage when the adolescent desperately searches for identity models, significant peers, and understanding adults. It is not a comfortable, smooth sailing period for the adolescents but a growth period when the growing child may experience all sorts of affective, behavioral, cognitive, and attitudinal conflicts. It is widely believed that the success of this transition step between childhood and adulthood depends on personal trust in a person's abilities (Bandura, 1977). At this stage, the role of self-esteem in the life of an adolescent appears pertinent. Studies have evinced that one-third to one-half of adolescents struggle with low self-esteem, especially during adolescence (Harter, 1990; Hirsch & Dubois, 1991). The results of low self-esteem can lead to various problems like-submission, self-inflicted injuries, depression, and aggression (Battle, 1990; Bhatti, 1992). Thus, it is easy to refer that self-esteem has a pivotal role to play in the psychological functioning of an adolescent in particular. Students with low self-esteem are usually unassertive and internalize feelings, making them explode and

fight over minor provocations, flouting school rules and regulations. They often do not possess the skills of effective communication, which will enable them to manage their feelings to stand up for their rights without putting down others. One of the researches evinced about the positive relationship among assertiveness, self-confidence, and self-esteem (Whirter, 1985). Self-esteem has been linked with several important life outcomes, including psychological adjustment, physical health, academic success, and relationship satisfaction (Kernis, 2006). Students with low self-esteem are unable to express their opinions, interests, and needs because of having a threat of rejection.

Assertiveness is a quality of being self-assured and confident without being aggressive or submissive (Alberti & Emmons, 1982). In the field of psychology, assertiveness is a skill and a means of communication that can be learned. It is characterized by a confident declaration of a statement that affirms the person's rights or point of view without threatening the rights of another. Those who practice assertiveness lead a happy, honest, and less manipulative life as compared to aggressive and submissive individuals. Unassertive people are usually unable to do anything about

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their condition. Still, they might eventually burst into a fit of anger at what they find difficult doing, and this depicts psychological dysfunction (Anyamene et al., 2016). They often fear being judged negatively by others.

Consequently, they are characterized by behaviors easily pushed around by way of manipulation. It makes them unable to stand up for their rights in matters that concern them. The core of unassertiveness comes from low self-esteem. The unassertive person feels inferior and automatically believes that another person's point of view is more reliable than theirs.

Assertiveness, therefore, is a skill which, if mastered right at the stage of adolescence, could bring about rich dividends in the future. Assertive training helps to increase in the awareness of personal rights. Besides, it also helps in differentiating between assertiveness, submissiveness, and aggressiveness. It also deals with the teaching of how to set personal boundaries and how to avoid manipulation or abuse through fear. So, the best way to deal with the unassertive person is to let them realize their rights by creating awareness of how to stand on their rights. It is a practical model that teaches and encourages the outward expression of feelings and raising individual self-esteem if adequately applied (Nnodum, 2001). The technique is based on the principle of social learning theory. Therefore, it incorporates social skill training methods in line with the idea that social behaviors could be learned and unlearned through practice. It is based on the assumption that assertive and non-assertive behaviors are learned and can be unlearned through the application of social learning theory. The training is often conducted in groups using modeling, role-playing, and ethical behavior rehearsal and reinforcement to practice new behavior in everyday life. Skill learning requires considerable practice, adequate information, good modeling to facilitate change. The technique primarily focuses on enhancing a student's self-esteem through direct instructions on how to act assertively through behavior rehearsal, role-playing, verbal instructions, and modeling (Nnodum, 2001). The practice of the various assertive skills is expected to avail the students of the opportunity to effect change in their behavior by being expressive and stand up for their rights without violating the rights of others. According to Whirter (1985), assertiveness helps in boosting self-confidence and this could positively influence self-esteem.

### Statement of the Problem

Assertiveness and self-esteem are considered essential factors for every adolescent. During adolescence, they play a vital role in the social relationships and interactions of an individual (Harries & Orth, 2019). Often adolescents with low self-esteem have problems associated with adjustment in their school environment, particularly their teen friends' group, and will not easily fit into society. The self-esteem of an adolescent is an essential contributor to his/her growth and development. Bameister (2002) also believed that the process of development of self-esteem begins from childhood and gains momentum during the turbulent years of adolescence. Studies have also shown that individuals who

have assertive behaviors generally have higher self-worth and are more successful in life. The skill of assertion enables a person to express true feelings, needs, opinions, and personal rights positively and productively without infringing upon the rights of others (Alberti & Emmons, 1982). They claim their rights, make requests of others, can say no to things they do not want, accept praise, and can easily verbalize their feelings. Having learned the skill of assertiveness makes their lives open to experience positive responses from others as well. This, in turn, can decrease their stress, anxiety, and increase confidence, self-esteem in interpersonal relations (Deltsidou, 2008 & Shimizu et al., 2009). Literature suggests the key role of assertiveness. Andrea et al. (2013) found that assertiveness was associated with self-esteem and psychological well-being.

Several studies have been done on the association of self-esteem and assertiveness training (AT); still there is dissonance regarding the findings of these studies. Some researchers found that self-esteem increases through assertiveness training (Stake, Deville, Pennell, 1982; Shimizu, Shinya, Mishima and Nagata, 2004; Alkhalwaldeh, 2011; Akbari et al., 2012 & Hamoud, et al., 2011; Tannous, 2015; Kashani & Bayat 2010; Niaraki & Rahimi, 2013; Morgan et al., 1996) while others (Gulshen, 2003 & Babakhani, 2011) reported no change in the self-esteem after assertiveness training. These contradictions regarding the findings of assertiveness training on self-esteem led to the conduction of the present study.

### Objectives of the study

- To assess the level of assertive, aggressive, submissive, and self-esteem of students.
- To assess the impact of Assertiveness training on assertive, aggressive, submissive, and self-esteem of students.

### Hypotheses of the study

Based on the review of literature following hypotheses were generated:

- There would be a significant difference among the scores of the assertive, aggressive, submissive, and self-esteem of students.
- Assertiveness training would be effective in increasing the assertiveness, self-esteem, and decreasing the aggression and submission of the students.

### Method

#### Sample

Four English medium schools of Sagar, M.P., were contacted for sample collection, out of these two schools given permission. The initial participants for the present study were consisted of 359 students, comprising of both male and female students with a mean age of 14.89 years. Participants were recruited from two higher secondary schools, namely Army Public School and Vatsalya Senior Secondary School of Sagar, (M. P). Out of a total of 359

students, four students had returned the questionnaire incomplete. Hence, the total sample comprised of 355 students. Participants were divided randomly into experimental and control groups.

### Research Tools

Following tools were employed in the study:

*For measuring assertiveness, submissiveness, and aggressiveness:*

The assertiveness scale developed by Parray et al., (2019) to measure the assertiveness, submissiveness, and aggressiveness. This scale has three sub-scales, namely, assertiveness, submissiveness, and aggressiveness. The scale was standardized on 3200 Indian adolescents. It consists of 48 items with a five-point scale (5-Always, 4-Often, 3-Sometimes, 2-Rarely; 1-Never). The reliability of each sub-scale was measured, assertiveness (.78), submissiveness (.75), and aggressiveness (.79). The overall reliability was estimated by computing Cronbach's Alpha, which was .85. Among the three sub-scales, the dimension that has the highest score reflects the behavior of the individual, followed by other dimensions.

*For measuring the self-esteem*

To measure the self-esteem of the participants, the Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used. It is a 10-item self-report measure of self-esteem based upon satisfaction of one's self and life. The scale consists of five positive items and five negative items and needs to be scored accordingly by reversing the value of either the positive or negative item responses. Typically, each item is answered on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree. The internal consistency ranges from .77 to .88, with test-retest reliability ranges from 0.82 to 0.85. The scale ranges from 0-30, (0<15 low self-esteem), (15: 25 within the normal range of self-esteem), (+25 high self-esteem).

*Design of the study*

A Pre-post quasi-experimental design was used for the present study. Pre-test and post-test were given to both the experimental and the control groups. The training was given only to the experimental group. The duration of the training period was five weeks comprising of a total of ten sessions, two sessions per week, and each session took 45 minutes.

### Procedure

#### Ethical Considerations

The study procedure was approved by the expert committee of the Department of Psychology, Doctor Harisingh Gour Vishwavidyalaya, Sagar M.P. After the procurement of the psychometric tools, the participants were debriefed about the primary aim of the study. Written consent was obtained from all the participants who agreed to participate in the study. They were also informed that they have the right to refrain from participating in the

study at any time. It was also assured to them that data confidentiality and participant's privacy were secured.

**Pre-test:** During the pre-test, the initial sample consisted of 359 students who responded to the Assertiveness scale and Self-esteem scale to prepare their baseline scores. Out of 359 students, four students have not completed the entire questionnaire. After screening, 130 students who scored low on the assertiveness were selected and allocated to intervention, i.e. assertiveness training. In addition to that, the subjects were further divided into two groups, experimental (N=65) and control group (N=65). The sample was further divided into two groups, who were matched based on assertiveness score and place of residence.

**Training:** The experimental group received assertiveness training, whereas the control group received no training. The duration of the training period was five weeks comprising of a total of ten sessions, two sessions per week, and each session took 45 minutes.

**Post-test:** In the post-test, which was administered on the 7th day after the last training session, both groups once again responded to the Assertiveness scale and Self-esteem.

### Data analysis

In this study, the obtained data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 25). Descriptive analysis (Mean, Standard Deviation) and Independent sample t-test were used to evaluate the data.

### Results

As seen in table 1, the pre-test scores for the aggression, assertiveness, and submission in the experimental group are 50.66, 44.61, and 40.00, and in the control group are 47.15, 45.95, and 42.56 respectively. The post-test scores for the aggression, assertiveness, and submission in the experimental group are 42.05, 55.95, and 32.91, and in the control group are 47.56, 48.18, and 43.90, respectively. This clarifies that before the intervention, the two groups were alike in terms of aggressive, assertive, and submissive behavior. However, in the post-test, we observe a significant effect of assertiveness training in the aggression, assertiveness, and submission levels of the experimental group.

From table 2, the pre-test score for the self-esteem in the experimental group are 15.38 and in the control group are 16.20, respectively. The post-test scores for the self-esteem in the experimental group are 20.56 and in the control group are 17.11. Therefore the results confirmed that assertiveness training increases the self-esteem of students in the experimental group.

### Discussion

The present study was undertaken to assess and evaluate the impact of the assertiveness training on the aggression, submission, assertiveness, and self-esteem of adolescents.

**Table 1. Independent sample t-test results of Aggression, Assertiveness and Submission for experimental and control groups**

Variable	Group	Pre-test			Post-test			Significance
		N	M	SD	M	SD	't' Value	
Aggression	Experimental	60	50.66	15.72	42.05	13.72	3.19	P<0.05
	Control	60	47.15	13.29	47.56	13.81	.168	NS
Assertiveness	Experimental	60	44.61	10.86	55.95	13.25	5.12	P<0.05
	Control	60	45.95	11.39	48.18	14.70	.930	NS
Submission	Experimental	60	40.00	15.09	32.91	10.51	2.98	P<0.05
	Control	60	42.56	11.47	43.90	11.90	.625	NS

**Table 2. Independent sample t-test results of self-esteem for experimental and control groups**

Variable	Group	Pre-test			Post-test			Significance
		N	M	SD	M	SD	't' Value	
Self-esteem	Experimental	60	15.38	4.15	20.56	6.22	5.36	P<0.05
	Control	60	16.20	5.07	17.11	4.44	1.05	NS

In this study, it was hypothesized that AT would increase assertiveness and self-esteem and reduce aggression and submission in the experimental group. The findings of the study proved that after the intervention, there is a significant change in the attack, submission, and assertiveness of the students in the experimental group. However, no change was depicted in the control group, where no training was given to the students. This indicates that the assertiveness training had significantly modified the behaviour of the students from submissive behaviour to assertive behaviour and from aggressive to assertive. The findings are in line with the previous studies conducted by (Chittenden, 1942; Gittelman, 1965; Sarason, 1968; Kaufman, Wagner and Barb, 1972; Pentz, 1980; Mami et al., 2015; Babakhani, 2016; Dehnavi et al., 2016 & Elizabeth, 2019) who reported that assertiveness training is effective in modifying the aggressive behavior of adolescent students. As for the explanation of the above finding, it can be concluded that the aggressive person claims their rights, express their emotions and ideas in ways that are usually inappropriate. So it seems that after the treatment, they learn to know how to express emotions efficiently and appropriately without hurting others. Moreover, (Ostrov et al., 2006) reported that there is an inverse relationship between assertiveness and aggression. In addition to that, people who lack communication skills have less social adjustment in interaction with others. When they fail in their interactions, they react aggressively and often

submissively. So AT helps them to realize reasons for incorrect or inappropriate behavior, and they learn different methods to cope with situations.

Concerning the submissive behaviour a significant difference was observed between the pre-test and post-test submission scores in the experimental group. The obtained results hereby confirm that before the intervention students have a lack of assertiveness as they are not able to share or express their viewpoints because of having a threat of rejection, fear of losing respect, and assessed negatively. They also avoid conflict by avoiding communication about their wishes, feelings, opinions, and needs, which damages their relationships in the long run. But as we displayed from the results that after the intervention, AT helps them to how to express freely and stand up in front of others without any hesitation. Moreover, a trained counselor (Griffin, 2019) suggested that by learning how to communicate, honestly and directly, you can avoid submissive interactions and become a more assertive person.

The present study also revealed that AT significantly increases the assertiveness among students. Hence it proved that the research hypothesis was accepted as expected direction. This outcome is consistent with the previous studies by (Glassi et al., 1974; Culha, 1987; Perkins & Kemmerling, 1983; Nadim, 1995; Parray & Kumar, 2017; Omura et al., 2018 and Kanade, 2019). A probable reason for increasing the assertiveness among

students may be the verity that participating in AT has helped the students to reach the necessary self-analysis and practice assertive behaviour in different conditions and how to apply it practically in their daily life. Besides, the AT provided opportunities for students in the sessions with the help of role-playing methods to explore relationships with others and helped them in identifying the benefits of assertiveness with others. In other words, completing the AT was beneficial for students to learn the concept of assertive behavior and differentiate it from aggressive and submissive behaviour.

Secondly, it was hypothesized. Students who attended the AT had significantly higher levels of self-esteem than those who did not receive the training. This assumption has been accepted as findings revealed that AT was significantly effective in improving the self-esteem of students in the experimental group. The present findings are relevant with the researches performed by (Stake et al., 1982; Temple and Robson, 1991; Morgan et al., 1996; Friesenhahn, 1999; Shimizu et al., 2004; Yadav & Iqbal, 2009; Kashani & Bayat, 2010; Alkhaldeh, 2011; Akbari et al., 2012; Neisi & Yeylugh, 2003; Tannous, 2015; Parray & Kumar, 2017; Kanade, 2018; Griffin, 2019; Mohamed et al., 2019; Binuja, 2020 and Malik & Varghese, 2020) but contrary to the findings of (Gulshen, 2003) who reported no significant effect on self-esteem.

To justify the above results, it can be said that AT increases the self-esteem of the students. Moreover, there are also several reasons for the obtained results. First, an investigation of self-esteem construct (Branden, 2001) gives us an idea of why AT positively affects the self-esteem of students. First, assertiveness is an essential component of self-esteem, if assertiveness increases self-esteem increases. Second, AT not only explains the concepts of (aggression, submission & assertion), social interactions (giving compliments, how to deal with criticism,) and overt behaviors (standing posture, eye contact, voice fluctuations), but also on the thought processes (How to think more positively & assertively), this provides the student to practice the personal integrity and living consciously. Additionally, the discussion on the assertive rights during the training sessions motivates the student to be self-responsible and accept themselves comfortably.

The second reason is that Bem (1967) also reported when a person starts to use a new style of behavior, his or her self concept is changed. Several researchers (Bower & Bower, 1967; Alberti & Emmons, 1975 and Lange & Jacobowski, 1976) also postulated that AT results in changing attitudes towards self, including increased self-esteem. The present study's findings are in coherence with the findings of the study of (Utami et al., 2019) that assertiveness training can affect assertiveness, which results in increasing self-esteem among adolescents. Besides, when an individual accepts their weakness and at the same time, recognizes their positive qualities and strengths, the individual will experience substantial self worth and high self-esteem.

## Conclusion

The findings of the present study support several conclusions that might be helpful to future researchers working with adolescents. The study proved that assertiveness training was effective in changing the behaviour of the students from aggressive behaviour to assertive behaviour and from submissive to assertive. The results also depicted that AT was significantly effective in improving the self-esteem of students in the experimental group. The study also proved that assertiveness training encourages students to value themselves, think positively, and rationally about their esteem and others. The study will be of great importance for parents, teachers, counselors, and students in the society who contribute to the development and improvement of quality of life of adolescents.

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## Competing Interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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