

# The Effect of Assertiveness Training on Behaviour, Self-esteem, Stress, Academic Achievement and Psychological Well-Being of Students: A Quasi-Experimental Study

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## To cite this article:

Waqar Maqbool Parray, Sanjay Kumar. The Effect of Assertiveness Training on Behaviour, Self-esteem, Stress, Academic Achievement and Psychological Well-Being of Students: A Quasi-Experimental Study. *Research & Development*. Vol. 3, No. 2, 2022, pp. 83-90.

doi: 10.11648/j.rd.20220302.13

**Received:** March 11, 2022; **Accepted:** March 30, 2022; **Published:** April 20, 2022

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**Abstract:** *The need to communicate is as essential as the need to breathe. The communication between human beings is a shared social system and a vital part of human activity. To overcome communication problems, the best way to communicate effectively is to adopt an assertive attitude towards others. Otherwise, relations are likely to be ineffective. Therefore, The study examines the effect of assertiveness training on behaviour, self-esteem, stress, academic achievement and psychological well-being among students. Method: The study employs Quasi-experimental design where 70 participants aged 17-21 years were selected randomly and assigned into two groups as experimental (N-35) and control group (N-35). Tools: Assertiveness scale (AS), self-esteem questionnaire (RSE) and perceived stress scale (PSS), academic achievement (AAS) and psychological well-being (PWB) were used. Results: The findings showed a significant decrease in aggression and submission scores in post-test condition but not in the follow up. It also revealed that assertiveness training was efficacious in raising students' assertiveness, self-esteem, academic achievement and significantly reducing stress. This effect appears to be sustained for about 2-months as the follow-up reflects. Conclusion: It may be concluded that the Assertiveness Training when introduced in academic institutions will have a sustained effect in enhancing the students' overall well being and achievement.*

**Keywords:** Assertiveness, Stress, Self-esteem, Adolescents

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## 1. Introduction

As social being people strive hard to achieve and maintain substantial interpersonal relations in life, in order to live a good and peaceful life. But, as a matter of fact many of them experience problems with regard to their interpersonal communication, struggle in asserting themselves and also lack the skills to improve their personal relationships. Individuals may behave and act aggressively or submissively as they have all the right to proclaim themselves. Such individuals are likely to be discontented in their social and personal lives. People around these non-assertive individuals may dislike and disrespect them, causing low self-respect, loneliness and feelings of unworthiness. Hence, non-assertive behavior may be equated to unadaptive behavior.

Assertiveness encompasses multidimensional aspects of human expression, including behavior, cognition, and affect. Behaviorally assertive individuals are able to express their emotions, defend their goals, and establish favorable interpersonal relationships [1]. While cognitively and affectively assertive individuals can appropriately deal with both positive and negative emotions [2]. Unlike non-assertive behavior, assertive behavior is positive, adaptive and healthy. Assertive individuals feel good about themselves, as they can create meaningful and fulfilling relationships and also enjoy effective interpersonal relationships. Assertiveness has emerged as a communication style that enhances successful relationships with colleagues as well [3]. Effective persons maintain self-respect and respect for others by means of assertiveness which enables them to directly express one's

true, basic feelings, needs, desires, opinions and personal rights in a positive, productive way without denying the rights of others. Assertive individuals claim their own rights, make requests of others, can say no to things they do not want, accept praise and can easily verbalize their feelings. All of these make their lives easier, better and help them experience positive responses from others. This in turn can decrease their stress anxiety and increase confidence in interpersonal relations [4]

Assertiveness is important for students to make successful relationships with, seniors, peer groups, friends, neighbors, teachers and colleagues etc. As they need assistance from others in different settings, they have to be assertive in order to meet the challenges. If they are unable to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas they can lose their sense of personal identity. Moreover their relationships can also be affected by a lack of openness and poor communication, that leading them to depression anxiety and stress.

Assertiveness training (AT) has been widely and effectively used with varied populations such as women, married couples, nurses and psychiatric patients. A lot of research work has been done in the western population than in India. In recent years the topic of interpersonal relationships has attracted increasing attention. Individuals have started looking for ways of improving the quality of their interpersonal relationships in the family as well as in other institutions. AT is supposed to help the individual to realize one's own strength without abusing the rights of others. Many individuals now realize that they lack the necessary skills to be able to stand for their rights and they want to have a choice about acting assertively.

Therefore, it is more appropriate to train the students to learn assertive skills through training program.

## 2. Rationale of the Study

Assertiveness training is potentially beneficial for adolescents, and observed to have several long lasting positive consequences for enhancing the overall development of the individual. Assertiveness is an important construct for enhancing the overall personality of the individual. Review of literature suggest dearth of studies on AT in India.

The self-esteem of a student is an important contributor of his/her growth and development. Studies have been done in the field of the assertiveness training on self-esteem but with mixed findings. Some studies reported that assertiveness training increases the level of self-esteem. This statement is reported by many researchers [4-9]. But other studies [10] reported no change in the self-esteem after the assertiveness training. Such a contradiction necessitates more studies.

Self-esteem and assertiveness are significantly related to stress with assertiveness contributing to self-esteem and self-esteem being a predictive of stress [11]. Various researches have observed mixed findings about assertiveness and stress levels. Some researches show that there is a positive association between assertiveness and stress [12], while other pointed out that difficulty in asserting oneself are often

positively associated with stress levels throughout one's life. Other researchers reported that assertiveness training decreases the level of stress [13, 14]. Several findings depicted that (AT) increases assertiveness among students [15-18] and helps in understanding assertiveness, and also prepares them to advocate for themselves and work to resolve interpersonal conflicts [19-21]. Literature also revealed that assertiveness and anxiety are negatively related [22]. In Indian context adolescents are not openly express their opinions in front of others. The assertiveness training helps them in expressing their opinions and in reducing their psychological burden including stress and anxiety. In this way, the present work may give us new insights to understand the effects of assertiveness training on the stress level of Indian adolescents who may be quite different from Western countries' adolescents.

The assertive communication style is considered better as it led to success and minimize the factors which decrease self-achievement and thus enhanced psychological well being [23]. Issues of students like assertiveness and psychological well being have not gained so much maturity in India. A general observation of student's behaviour in India suggests that most of them express submissive or aggressive responses and lack assertiveness. There is a need of research on student's assertiveness and its impact on psychological well-being in India. Western studies reported that there is positive association between assertiveness and psychological well-being [24-28].

Education for assertiveness should aim at countering influences that lead to fear and exclusion of others, and should help students to develop capacities for critical thinking independent judgment etc. Several studies related to assertiveness and academic achievement exhibits contradictory findings. Some studies indicated that assertiveness is positively associated with academic achievement [29-32] while other studies depict no significant relation between assertiveness levels and academic success of students [33, 34], and also significant negative association between assertiveness and academic performance of students [35]. In short, the association of assertiveness and academic achievement is inconsistent, which needs further examination through the present research work.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To assess the assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviour of students.
- 2) To assess the self-esteem, stress, psychological well-being and academic achievement of students.
- 3) To investigate the effect of AT on assertive, aggressive and submissive behaviour.
- 4) To investigate the effect of AT on self-esteem, stress, psychological well-being and academic achievement of students.

## 4. Hypotheses of the Study

- 1) The AT will be effective in increasing the assertiveness

and decreasing the aggression and submission of students.

- 2) The AT will positively affect the self-esteem, psychological well-being, academic achievement and negatively the stress.

## 5. Method

### 5.1. Sample

The sample was comprised of 70 students (Age range 17-20 years) of Doctor Harisingh Gour University Sagar, Madhya Pradesh drawn randomly and then assigned to experimental (N-35) and control groups (N-35).

### 5.2. Measures

**Assertiveness scale:** This is a self-designed tool developed by (Parry et al 2019) for measuring the assertiveness level of the students. The scale consists of 48 items. There are three dimensions of this scale assertive, aggressive and submissive. Five-point Likert format (i.e., always, often, sometimes, rarely, never) was used for this scale. The scale was administered on students individually. The Cronbach's Alpha of the scale was .84.

**The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale:** developed by Rosenberg (1965). This scale consists of 10- items. The (RSES) scale consists of five positive items and five negative items. Each item is answered on a four point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The internal Consistency ranges from 0.77 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 normal range of self- esteem), +25 high self esteem).

**Perceived Stress Scale:** developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983). It is designed to measure the perception of stress. The scale (PSS) consists of 10-items each item is answered on 5-point scale. Respondents were asked how often in the last month they experienced specific stressful feelings. Reliability of PSS was .78-.86. The test-retest reliability of PSS was .85. Higher scores refer to a higher level of perceived stress.

**Psychological Well-Being:** developed by Ryff's (1989). The scale (PWB) had 42 items which comprises of six psychological dimensions. The dimensions include self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth. Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ranged from .86 to .93. The test retest reliability for each dimension was 0.86 to 0.93.

**Academic Achievement:** This scale developed by Anderson et al., 2016, measures academic adjustment (AA) of the student. This scale represents three components/ three dimensional construct of academic adjustment which is academic life style, academic achievement and academic motivation and it comprises 9 items. Responses are elicited on 5 point scale. The test-retest reliability of the academic adjustment was .84. With regard to the study, the researcher used the academic achievement dimension of the above said scale.

*Table 1. Detail of training sessions.*

Groups	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test	Follow-up
Experimental Group	All Measures	AT (8 Sessions)	All Measures	All Measures
Control Group	All Measures	No Treatment	All Measures	All Measures

### 5.3. Design of the Study

Pre-post Quasi-experimental design along with control group was used to achieve the aim of the study.

#### 5.3.1. Procedure

The study was approved by the Head of the department of Psychology Dr. Harisingh Gour University Sagar M.

P. After the procurement of the psychometric tools, the participants were debriefed about the basic aim of the study. Written consent was obtained from all the participants. It was made clear to them that their participation was voluntary and they have the right to refrain from participating in the study at any time. The researcher established rapport with the participants followed by oral instructions. It was assured to them that all data would strictly confidential.

*The study had four phases:*

- 1) Phase 1 assessment pre-test.
- 2) Phase 2 intervention, AT.
- 3) Phase 3 assessment post-test and.
- 4) Phase 4 follow-up.

**Pre-test:** In the pre-test, the initial sample consisted of 100 students responded to Assertiveness, self-esteem, stress, academic achievement, and psychological-wellbeing. Out of 100 students, 70 students who scored less on the above measures and high on stress were selected as the main sample. The sample was further divided into 2 groups, who were matched based on parent's education, economic status, assertiveness score and place of residence. In order to maintain the effectiveness of the training sessions, the subjects were further divided into 5 groups consisted of 7 students each.

**Training:** In the training phase, the experimental group received assertiveness training, one session of 45 minutes per week for 45 days.

**Post-test:** In the post-test, which was administered on 7th day after the last training session, both groups responded to all measures i.e. Assertiveness, self-esteem, stress, academic achievement, and psychological-wellbeing once more.

**Follow-up:** was conducted 60 days after the last training session with both groups.

#### 5.3.2. The Training Protocol Is as Follows

Session 1. First session begins with the introductory part

about the training program. In addition to that certain rules and regulations about the training along with rapport establishment were introduced. Moreover, this session commence with the ice breaking method, contract, confidentiality followed by the overview of assertiveness and the reasons for attending AT.

Session 2. This session starts with the comparison of passive, aggressive and assertive communication styles with their beliefs and consequences.

Session 3. In this session each communication style discussed with the aid of videos and how to act assertively through modeling, behaviour rehearsal, role-playing, and verbal instructions followed by simulation.

Session 4: During this session, why assertive is important, what you lose or gain by being assertive and what are the demerits of non assertive.

Session 5. This session includes the videos of each communication style, why we are being unassertive, and the beliefs about Saying No.

Session 6. This session includes identifying the responses of each communication style. Apart from that introduce the

bill of assertive rights with a number of the practice exercise for assertion and the assertiveness pitfall followed by simulation.

Session 7. This session starts with how to deal with criticism, how to respond; how to give criticism assertively and why participants may have trouble responding well to criticism.

Session 8. Final session includes various techniques used to effectively help the participants in the process of becoming an assertive person. Such techniques include (Being-specific, Broken-record, Content-to process shift, Workable compromise, Assertive agreement, Clouding, self-disclosure, Assertive inquiry, Assertive empathy, Cutting the sound and negative assertion.

## 6. Statistical Analysis

The study 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.

*Table 2. Independent sample t-test results of Aggression, assertiveness and Submission for experiment and control groups.*

Experimental Group				Control Group		‘t’	Sig.
Variables	Tests	M	SD	M	SD		
Aggression	Pre-test	55.08	07.84	52.82	11.64	1.15	NS
	Post-test	48.40	11.59	41.25	10.02	3.10	P<0.05
	Follow-up	44.68	09.89	48.91	10.84	1.70	NS
Assertiveness	Pre-test	44.51	08.75	45.57	08.41	1.50	NS
	Post-test	47.82	09.35	46.88	08.89	1.04	NS
	Follow-up	53.65	10.30	46.31	08.40	3.26	P<0.05
Submission	Pre-test	44.51	08.17	43.20	08.63	.800	NS
	Post-test	40.80	09.47	36.08	10.08	2.17	P<0.05
	Follow-up	40.11	11.00	43.11	08.24	1.29	NS

## 7. Results

As shown in Table 1, the findings depict no significant difference in the aggression and submission levels among the experimental and control groups when compared before the intervention. This clarifies that prior to the intervention, the two groups were alike in terms of aggressive, assertive and submissive behavior. However, in post-test we observe a

significant drop in the aggression and submission levels of the experimental group. Although not significantly, but the aggression and submission scores of the subjects declined in the follow-up as well. Interestingly, the participants in the intervention group also had higher mean assertiveness scores than the control group in the post-test although this difference was not significant. Moreover, in the follow-up a significant difference in assertiveness scores emerged.

*Table 3. Independent sample t-test results of self-esteem, stress and academic achievement for experiment and control groups.*

Experimental Group				Control Group		‘t’	Sig.
Variables	Tests	M	SD	M	SD		
Self-esteem	Pre-test	17.80	04.89	17.28	04.21	.503	NS
	Post-test	20.77	04.62	17.94	05.09	2.53	P<0.05
	Follow-up	21.60	04.25	17.97	05.06	3.24	P<0.05
Stress	Pre-test	22.68	04.29	22.00	04.19	.705	NS
	Post-test	18.54	05.89	21.31	03.38	2.20	P<0.05
	Follow-up	18.11	5.01	19.88	3.88	1.65	NS
Academic achievement	Pre-test	10.11	02.29	09.71	01.84	.733	NS
	Post-test	12.60	01.75	10.02	02.25	5.20	P<0.05
	Follow-up	12.37	2.04	9.80	02.25	4.99	P<0.05

Table 2 shows the results of the ‘t’ test computed to observe the effects of intervention on the self-esteem, stress

and academic achievement among the students in the experimental and control group. The ‘t’-values of post-test

(2.53, 2.20 & 5.20) further establish that there is a significant rise in the self-esteem, academic achievement and decrease in the stress among the students in the experimental group as

a result of the assertiveness training and the influence of training on the experimental group was maintained until follow-up except on stress.

**Table 4.** Independent sample t-test results of psychological well-being (PWB) and its dimensions for experiment and control groups.

Experimental Group				Control Group			
Variables	Tests	M	SD	M	SD	't'	Sig.
A	Pre-test	26.97	03.55	24.11	04.49	1.08	NS
	Post-test	29.60	06.09	25.00	05.72	-2.15	P<0.05
	Follow-up	30.05	05.51	23.94	3.94	5.37	P<0.05
EM	Pre-test	26.60	03.89	23.00	04.12	.284	NS
	Post-test	26.88	04.09	24.71	05.96	1.62	NS
	Follow-up	26.28	04.34	25.02	04.94	1.12	NS
PG	Pre-test	26.74	04.25	23.94	04.82	.725	NS
	Post-test	28.25	05.48	24.51	04.38	1.22	NS
	Follow-up	28.45	04.83	24.88	03.48	3.56	P<0.05
PR	Pre-test	26.74	04.25	23.25	04.35	.253	NS
	Post-test	27.05	05.36	24.37	05.26	1.11	NS
	Follow-up	28.42	05.41	25.25	03.82	2.82	P<0.05
PL	Pre-test	22.48	06.19	25.17	05.59	1.94	NS
	Post-test	28.45	06.34	24.60	04.47	3.72	P<0.05
	Follow-up	28.02	6.00	24.40	4.53	2.85	P<0.05
SA	Pre-test	24.82	03.14	25.91	04.81	1.02	NS
	Post-test	29.45	04.69	25.71	05.77	3.74	P<0.05
	Follow-up	29.68	05.35	24.74	03.50	4.56	P<0.05
Overall Well-being	Pre-test	151.88	13.60	154.65	14.23	.832	NS
	Post-test	173.02	17.20	167.02	18.78	.143	NS
	Follow-up	172.62	16.87	154.00	14.17	4.99	P<0.05

As indicated in table 3, the findings depicted a significant change in some dimensions of Psychological Well-being (PWB) like- autonomy (A), purpose in life (PL) and self-acceptance (SA). However, the findings of students' Environmental Mastery (EM), Personal Growth (PG), Positive Relations with others (PR) and overall well-being showed no significant difference in the post-test. Moreover the influence of assertiveness training on the experimental group was significantly maintained until follow-up except one dimension i.e. Environmental Mastery (EM).

## 8. Discussion

This study sought to evaluate the effect of the assertiveness training on the students' behaviour i.e. aggression, assertiveness, submission, self-esteem, stress, academic achievement and psychological well-being.

Specifically, five hypotheses were tested in this study through comparison of the experimental group to a control group. First, it was hypothesized that AT would increase assertiveness and reduce the aggression and submission in the experimental group. According to the results of this study the findings showed that AT reduces the aggression and submission of students significantly. Moreover it has also witnessed even after two months of training. These findings are supported by [36, 37] who reported assertiveness training is effective in reducing aggression among students. As for the explanation of our finding, it can be concluded that the aggressive behavior claiming their rights and expressing emotions and ideas in ways that are usually inappropriate. So it seems that AT helps them in expressing emotions easily and

appropriately without hurting others. Moreover [38] reported that there is an inverse relationship between assertiveness and aggression. The findings also depicted that though not significantly but AT increases the assertiveness among students. However, in the follow-up a significant difference in assertiveness emerged. This outcome is consistent with the previous findings of studies by [17, 16, 39].

Second it was predicted, students who attended the assertiveness training had significantly higher levels of self esteem than those who did not receive the training. This study revealed that AT were significantly effective in improving the self-esteem of students in the treatment group and the impact of training on the experimental group was maintained until follow-up. The present findings are also relevant and concordant with the researches performed by [40].

It seems that the above obtained results on this outcome measure clearly show the superiority of the AT in modifying the self esteem of the students. A careful investigation of six elements of self-esteem construct [41] gives us an idea that why AT positively affects self esteem of participants. First, assertiveness is an essential component of self esteem, if assertiveness increases self esteem increases. Second, AT not only focuses on explanation of concepts (assertion, aggression, submission), overt behaviors (eye contact, standing posture, voice fluctuations) and social interactions (dealing criticism, giving compliments), but also on the thought processes (How to think more assertively), this provides the student to practice the personal integrity and living consciously. Additionally, the discussion on assertive rights during training motivates the subject to be self-responsible and accept himself comfortably.

The third hypothesis was related to the investigation of effect of assertiveness training on the level of stress among students. It was assumed that experimental group would show significant changes in the level of stress after training. The findings significantly show the effect of assertiveness training on the level of stress in the experimental group. In addition to that the effect has sustained even after follow-up. The above findings are in line with [42, 43, 44, 14]. Since stress is multifaceted phenomenon, so acquiring the skill of assertiveness helps in enhancement of psychological well-being and deterioration of level of stress among individuals. This is also depicted by the results of our study. Experimental group has attained lower level of stress as compared to control group suggesting the beneficial role of assertiveness training. While discussing the effect of AT in academic achievement, it was assumed that AT improves the academic achievement. The findings supported our assumption as results depicted significant effect of AT on academic achievement of students. Such findings remained even after two months. The present results supported previous researchers [29, 31, 32]. Academic achievement is also depended on the way student communicates and expresses themselves henceforth assertiveness training has led to the increment in the academic achievement and it is evident from the findings of this study. In addition to that the findings showed no significant effect of AT on the overall psychological well-being of students. These findings are contrary to the previous study [28]. But after the follow-up a significant effect has been witnessed in overall psychological well-being. However, some dimensions showed significant difference like Autonomy (A), Purposeful life (PL), self-acceptance (SA). The follow-up results showed that AT has an effect on all dimensions of psychological well-being except Environmental Mastery (EM). Here it seems that now after treatment students are able to accept themselves, likes most aspects of their personality, become confident in their opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus. Attaining psychological well-being spontaneously is a myth and it is evident from this study, the follow up scores showed enhancement hence it reflects that psychological well-being is a persistent process and requires efforts. Practice of assertiveness skills in daily life has surely helped students in attaining better well-being.

## 9. Conclusion

The findings of the present study have provided a guideline for psychologists, teachers and counselors especially for those working in school and college settings, that through provision of assertiveness training they can reduce the aggression, submission, stress and increase the assertiveness of the students and improved their self-esteem, psychological well being, thereby resulting in uplift of their academic achievements indirectly. It was also depicted that the influence of assertiveness training does not last for a short duration but its effect has remained as such after 2 months of training. In addition to that, it is significant for psychologists, teachers and

counselors to take benefit of assertiveness training as treatment strategy for assisting the overall personality of the students. Further research is required to examine the role of socio-cultural factors that may enhance or deteriorate the grasping capacity of the students to be assertive.

## Conflict of Interest

All the authors do not have any possible conflicts of interest.

## Ethical Approval

The study was approved from the ethical committee of Doctor Harisingh Gour Vishwavidyalaya Sagar (M.P.).

## Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the Department of Psychology, School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Dr. Harisingh Gour Vishwavidyalaya, Sagar, M.P., India and also students of the department who joined the study for their close attention and serious participation.

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