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*Personality correlates of emotional blackmail in close
relationships*

Osobowościowe korelaty szantażu emocjonalnego w bliskich związkach

Key words: personality, emotional blackmail, close relationships

Słowa kluczowe: osobowość, szantaż emocjonalny, bliskie związki

INTRODUCTION

The five-factor personality model of Costa and McCrae is a continuation of Cattell's personality factor structure theory and the concept of Eysenck's three super personality factors [1-2].

The results of many years of research conducted by Costa and McCrae indicate that the five dimensions, hence more than in Eysenck's (3) and less than in Cattell's (16), is a necessary number, and at the same time sufficient to create a classification of basic dispositions occurring universally, although with different intensity in every human being. These dimensions are: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to new experiences, agreeableness and conscientiousness [2].

Neuroticism reflects the susceptibility to experiencing negative emotions. People with a high level of this characteristic have lower ability to control the drives and struggle with stress. They are overly self-critical, hypersensitive, depressive, react with fear, tension, are easily discouraged and break down in difficult situations. They often experience anger and show low self-esteem [3].

The opposite of neuroticism is extraversion. Extroverts tend to react positively, and thus they are characterized by life optimism and a cheerful mood. They are sociable, cordial, eagerly looking for new sensations and stimulation. At the same time, they are characterized by assertiveness and a tendency to dominate in interpersonal relations [4].

The third dimension of personality - openness to new experiences - characterizes people who have an interest in the world. People with high level of openness are creative, endowed with vivid and creative imagination, unconventional, prone to questioning authorities and independent in the judgment. They have a high aesthetic sensitivity, which is why they often show an interest in art [5].

The next dimension is agreeableness expressing straightforwardness, modesty, submissiveness, but also a tendency to feel sorry for oneself and altruism. People with high level of agreeableness are cordial in relationships with other people and willing to help them. They think that others reveal similar attitudes like them and are convinced of the good intentions of other people [6].

The last, fifth factor is conscientiousness, which is reflected by prudence, reliability, meticulousness and self-discipline. High intensity of this factor is characteristic for those motivated to act and persistently striving to achieve their goals [7].

The theory of Costa and McCrae treats the five dimensions mentioned above as real existing psychological structures. They have a strong biological basis and are not directly affected by the environment. They are a universal building block of personality, are not just labels describing individual differences, but structures of causative nature, shaping the life of every human being, which allows us to surmise that they also play a significant role in emotional blackmail in close relationships [2, 8-9].

Emotional blackmail is a strong form of manipulation. Its essence is a set of strategies and tactics based on trickery, cunning, cleverness and appearances, and also intelligence, consciously used to achieve the intended personal goals. The blackmailer, using camouflaged methods, deftly controls the behavior of the victim. The more the blackmailer convinces the interaction partner about the nobility of his actions, the more the blackmailer can use the other person's emotions and at the same time control his own, the greater the success of the actions. The perpetrator gradually builds a world of illusion around the victim, depriving the victim of the opportunity to calmly assess the situation and take rational action. Manipulation distorts the

person's perception so effectively that it is extremely difficult to see the intentions of the blackmailer and to deal with the manipulation. It creates doubt about the validity of previous convictions, changes them, and then changes behavior, adapting it to the intentions of the interaction partner [9-13]. Moreover, as shown by the results of the research, the victim often assumes the role of the perpetrator and vice versa - the blackmailer often plays the role of a victim [14].

There are two types of psychomanipulation, also called mind control - superficial and deep psychomanipulation. Superficial psychomanipulation does not reach the deep psychological structures of person. It applies mainly to one-time activities, such as the purchase of a product. In contrast, deep psychomanipulation reaches into emotions and thoughts, thus influencing making life decisions that are contrary to oneself. A person trying to gain control over another person's mind works in a very clever and at the same time masked way. As a rule, blackmailer's attitude is perceived as kind, which means that the victim does not take a defensive attitude and begins to cooperate unconsciously. Three successive stages of gaining control over the mind were distinguished: thawing, transformation and re-freezing. During thawing, the victim raises doubts about the truth of beliefs and judgments about the surrounding reality. At the stage of transformation, building a new identity of the victim in accordance with the perpetrator's vision. At the same time, the occurring monotony and monotony of the manipulator's activities deprive the victim of vigilance. In turn, in the phase of re-freezing, the personality of the manipulated person built in the previous stage strengthens and reinforces [15].

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH AND TEST METHOD

The main goal of the research is to determine the personality correlates of accepting the role of the victim and the perpetrator of emotional blackmail in close relationships.

Sociodemographic characteristics of the subjects are presented in Table 1. The test sample is formed by an equinumerous group of women and men (50.0%) living in marriages and cohabitation (50.0%). The analyzed population is dominated by people in the early adulthood (49.1%) who received higher education (84.5%) and have a regular source of income (80.4%). The group considered is homogenous as far as the place of residence (50.0%).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the studied group

	Variables	%
Gender	female	50,0
	male	50,0
Age	up to 24 years old	13,4
	between 25 and 39 years old	49,1
	between 40 and 60 years old	24,5
	from 61 years old	13,0
Education	vocational, primary	4,3
	secondary	11,2
	higher	84,5

	Variables	%
Professional activity	currently employed	80,4
	unemployed	8,6
	farm	7,8
	retirement/pension	3,2
Marital status	married	50,0
	cohabitation	50,0
Residency	village	50,0
	city	50,0

Source: own research results

The research tools used are the NEO-FFI Inventory of Costa and McCrae in the Polish adaptation of B. Zawadzki, J. Strelau, P. Szczepaniak and M. Śliwińska [16] and the Questionnaire My partner and I KBSE by M. Pawelec and J. Łukasiewicz [14].

The NEO-FFI Personality Inventory is used to diagnose five basic personality dimensions:

- neuroticism - reflects the emotional adjustment / emotional instability, susceptibility to feeling negative emotions, feelings of guilt and sensitivity to stress;
- extraversion - a feature that determines the quality and frequency of interaction with other people, as well as the level of activity, energy and predisposition to experiencing positive emotions;
- openness to experiences - describes the propensity of a person to seek and positively perceive new life experiences, openness to new things and cognitive curiosity;
- agreeableness - the characteristic defines positive / negative attitude towards people, altruism / antagonism;
- conscientiousness - the degree of organization, perseverance in action, motivation to achieve the assumed goal [16].

Questionnaire My partner and I KBSE is designed to diagnose the intensity of two dimensions - the role of the victim and the role of the perpetrator of emotional blackmail. The perpetrator of emotional blackmail is a person who uses manipulation towards a life partner, while a victim of emotional blackmail is a person that submits and subordinates its actions to manipulators' demands [14].

The research was individual, voluntary and anonymous. It was conducted by a psychologist in an environment of people living in marriages and cohabitation. The subjects received test sets containing written instructions, and in case of doubt they had the opportunity to obtain additional information from the researcher. The response time was not limited, but generally it was 20 minutes.

Statistical analyzes were performed using the IBM SPSS 24 program. The characteristics of the studied population were compiled on the basis of distribution of percentage of frequency occurrence of qualitative data. Correlation analyzes were

carried out using Spearman's rho coefficient. The limit level of error of the first kind was assumed at 0.05.

RESULTS

Performed analyzes of correlation matrices indicate that specific personality traits of people in marriages and informal relationships are involved when taking on the role of a victim and the perpetrator of emotional blackmail. The results of the calculations performed are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Relationships between personality traits and the occurrence of emotional blackmail in close relationships

Variables	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Openness to new experiences	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness
Victim	0,38**	-	-	0,32**	-
Perpertrator	0,41**	-	-	- 0,29*	- 0,36**

Marking: ** correlation is significant at 0.001 (bilaterally), * correlation significant at 0.01 (bilaterally).

Source: own research results

There were average directly proportional correlations between being a victim of emotional blackmail and neuroticism, $\rho = 0.38$; $p < 0.001$ and agreeableness, $\rho = - 0.32$; $p < 0.001$. The tendency to undergo psychomanipulation on the part of the partner increases with the increase of emotional maladaptation and the tendency to altruism.

Assuming the role of the perpetrator of emotional blackmail on average positively correlates with neuroticism, $\rho = 0.41$; $p < 0.001$, moderately negatively with conscientiousness, $\rho = - 0.36$; $p < 0.001$ and slightly inversely proportional to agreeableness, $\rho = - 0.29$; $p < 0.01$. The obtained data indicate that with the increase in susceptibility to experiencing emotions with negative valence, the frequency of emotional blackmail in a close relationship increases. In addition, the lower the tendency to submit, the stronger the tendency to assume the role of the psychomanipulation agent in a close relationship. The calculations also show that the higher the level of organization and meticulousness, the lower the tendency to use emotional blackmail towards the life partner.

No statistically significant relationships were found, $p > 0.05$, between the other dimensions of personality and performing the role of a victim or the perpetrator of emotional blackmail.

DISCUSSION

The main goal of the research was to verify what personality traits are associated with accepting the role of victim and the perpetrator of emotional blackmail in close relationships - marital and cohabitation.

The correlation analyzes carried out have shown that accepting the role of a victim of emotional blackmail positively coincides with neuroticism and agreeableness. The observed regularities are consistent with the conclusions drawn from the Mandal research, which shows that the tendency to experience emotions with negative valence and low resistance to stress combined with a sense of duty and guilt are the basic characteristics of victims of emotional blackmail used by perpetrators. The manipulator, using various techniques of exerting influence, intensifies person's fear of rejection and breaking off relations, and noticing the effects of actions taken, obtains confirmation of the power held over the partner and at the same time - thanks to the submission of the victim - consent to further such behavior. This is because the perpetrator knows the victim and her vulnerabilities well, knows exactly how to behave in a given situation, to lower own fear, get the partner to submit, and achieve own goals at the cost of the other person [12].

Results of the research indicate lack of emotional stability of people using psychomanipulation, which show that taking the role of the perpetrator of emotional blackmail shows a positive relationship with neuroticism and inversely proportional to agreeableness and conscientiousness. In the empirical work of other authors, the relationship between personality traits and performing the role of the manipulator was also noted. It was concluded that people with high level of neuroticism show tendencies to influence their partner through the so-called quiet treatment. However, along with the increase in conscientiousness, the tendency to use charm in the relationship decreases and the frequency of using regression behaviors (getting offended) decreases. In turn, the use of psychomanipulation based on forcing the partner to abandon a course of action negatively correlates with agreeableness [12, 17]. The association of Machiavellianism with the emotional maladjustment diagnosed with the NEO-FFI Questionnaire was also demonstrated in the studies of Garcia and González Moraga, but the relationship only occurred when the narcissistic tendencies and psychoticism of the respondents remained at a low level [18].

Muris and colleagues showed that the use of psychomanipulation is closely related to increased psychopathic and narcissistic tendencies, as well as low agreeableness, which is one of the dimensions of personality according to the Big Five [19]. In turn, the Burtăverdea team stated that the tendencies to use psychomanipulation play the role of a mediator of dependencies between neuroticism, agreeableness and conscientiousness and the intensity of impulsive aggressive behaviors [20], which simultaneously explains the lack of empathy and loyalty, as well as the tenacity and cynical attitude of the perpetrator of emotional blackmail towards the life partner [9, 21, 22]. In addition, Back's team pointed out that the use of manipulation is combined with strong concentration on oneself, competitiveness and impulsiveness [23].

The obtained research results and the results of the empirical works presented above lead to the conclusion that social adaptation and assertiveness can act as a

factor protecting against becoming a victim of emotional blackmail in close relationships. However, the risk of manipulating a life partner decreases when the person is characterized by high persistence and organization, as well as a positive attitude towards people and altruism.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The risk factors for taking on the role of a victim of emotional blackmail in close relationships are neuroticism and agreeableness.
2. The factors protecting against the use of emotional blackmail in close relationships are agreeableness and conscientiousness.
3. Neuroticism is the risk factor for taking on the role of the perpetrator of emotional blackmail in close relationships.
4. The data received can be used to develop preventive programs that support people in building healthy and satisfying close relationships.

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ABSTRACT

The five-factor personality model assumes that the constituting dimensions are relatively permanent and occur in each person in various configurations with causative structures that shape human life. This allows us to surmise that the factors identified in the Big Five theory are related to assuming the role of the victim and the perpetrator of emotional blackmail in close relationships. It is defined as a strong form of manipulation that involves influencing the emotions and behavior of a partner in order to achieve personal goals. The aim of the research is to determine the personality correlates of a victim and perpetrator of emotional blackmail in close relationships. The study group consists of 116 adults living in marriages and cohabitation. The research was carried out using the NEO-FFI Personality Inventory of P. Costa and R. McCrae in the Polish adaptation of B. Zawadzki, J. Strelau, P. Szczepaniak and M. Śliwińska and the Questionnaire My partner and I KBSE M. Pawelec and J. Łukasiewicz. The conducted correlation analyzes indicate that accepting the role of a victim of emotional blackmail positively relates to neuroticism and agreeability. On the other hand, acting as the perpetrator of psychomanipulation is directly proportional to neuroticism as well as negatively correlated with agreeability and conscientiousness.

STRESZCZENIE

Pięcioczynnikowy model osobowości zakłada, iż składające się na nią wymiary są względnie trwałe i występującymi u każdej osoby w różnej konfiguracji strukturami o charakterze sprawczym, które kształtują życie człowieka. Pozwala to przypuszczać, iż wyodrębnione w teorii Wielkiej Piątki czynniki wiążą się z przyjmowaniem roli ofiary oraz sprawcy szantażu emocjonalnego w bliskich związkach. Jest on definiowany jako silna forma manipulacji polegająca na wpływaniu na emocje i zachowania bliskiej osoby w celu osiągnięcia osobistych celów. Celem badań jest określenie osobowościowych korelatów pełnienia roli ofiary i sprawcy szantażu emocjonalnego w bliskich związkach. Badaną grupę stanowi 116 osób dorosłych żyjących w związkach małżeńskich oraz kohabitacyjnych. Badania przeprowadzono za pomocą Inwentarza Osobowości NEO-FFI P. Costy i R. McCrae w polskiej adaptacji B. Zawadzkiego, J. Strelau, P. Szczepaniaka i M. Śliwińskiej oraz Kwestionariusza Ja i mój partner KBSE M. Pawelec i J. Łukasiewicza. Przeprowadzone analizy korelacyjne wskazują, że przyjmowanie roli ofiary szantażu emocjonalnego dodatnio wiąże się z neurotycznością oraz ugodowością. Natomiast, pełnienie roli sprawcy psychomanipulacji wprost proporcjonalnie współwystępuje z neurotycznością, a także ujemnie z ugodowością i sumiennnością.

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