

## **ASSERTIVENESS AND SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE IN PREFERRED CONFLICT RESOLUTION STYLES**

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### **Abstract**

The study investigated whether assertiveness and social intelligence are significant predictors of preferred conflict resolution styles. Four hundred and three (403) participants, comprising 248 males and 155 females with mean age of 22.68 years completed a questionnaire pack which included the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS) used to assess assertiveness, the Nigerian version of the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) used to measure three facets of social intelligence - social information processing, social awareness and social skills, and the Conflict Scenarios and Rating Scale of Preference for Methods of Conflict Resolution, which assessed preference for the use of threat, acceptance, negotiation, mediation and arbitration in conflict resolution. The results indicated a significant negative relationship between assertiveness and acceptance, as well as assertiveness and negotiation, and a significant positive relationship between social information processing and negotiation as well as social information processing and arbitration. In addition, social information processing had a significant negative relationship with the use of threat, while social awareness had a significant positive relationship with negotiation. These findings imply that negotiation might not be effective when the parties are highly assertive, while adequate and accurate information processing as well as an awareness of socially acceptable behaviours would facilitate its adoption.

**Key words:** Arbitration, assertiveness, conflict resolution, negotiation, and social intelligence.

Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. It is a pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different individuals or groups and connotes disagreement, dispute or controversy in ideas, opinions or viewpoints, which are often rooted in people's beliefs and perceptions as opposed to objective facts. It is natural, necessary and normal but poses considerable challenge to the human race and it is endemic in modern societies. The problem is not the existence of conflict but how it is handled, because conflict occurs along cognitive (perception), emotional (feeling) and behavioural (action) dimensions in an interactive process. Hence, people tend to have different perceptions of conflict and one's perception of a conflict tend to influence the approach one employs in solving the conflict (Ome, 2013). Thus, conflict resolution focuses on reducing violence and involves approaches aimed at terminating conflicts by providing opportunities for the examination of alternative pay-offs in a situation of positioned disagreements. It is a process with a major objective of ending conflict between disagreeing parties.

According to Miller (2003), it is a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems. It refers to a wide variety of processes that encourage nonviolent dispute resolution outside of the traditional court system. The strategies employed to overcome conflict commonly encompass the categories of overt anger, compromise, avoidance, social support, obliging and distraction (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Conflict resolution as a process of defusing antagonism, and reaching agreement between conflicting parties generally includes peaceful negotiation, mediation, arbitration, diplomacy, collaboration,

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compromise, community conferencing, negotiated rulemaking, reconciliation and the "peace process" (peace-making, peace keeping, peace enforcement and peace building).

This study is concerned with five approaches to conflict resolution which have been the focus of concerted research and these methods include; threat, acceptance, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration (Ojji, 1998; Ome, 2013). Threat to the other party occurs when one of the parties in conflict notifies the other party of an intention to publicize the other party's action, and thus damage the other party's image and reputation, while acceptance of the situation implies that one of the parties complies with the demands of the other party. This corresponds with what Blau (1964) called conflict avoidance which enables a person avoid the risk or effort associated with confrontational strategies. Negotiation is when the parties seek compromise in order to reach a solution acceptable to both parties. In Blau's typology, this is called self-enhancement, and involves an attempt to persuade the other party that one's position is good enough to warrant attention by the other party. Mediation is when the parties seek the assistance of a third party to assist them in negotiation, that is, a neutral third party assists in the achievement of a negotiated solution. In this way, the parties try to reach an agreement (settlement) by following the mediator's guidance. Arbitration involves a third party who has authority to impose binding agreement on conflicting parties.

Conflict is a conscious act involving personal or group contact and communication (Otite & Albert, 2007), and one of the factors in interpersonal conflict is lack of communication (Verderber & Verderber, 2001) or faulty communication. At the root of communication problems is social skills deficit (Rook, 1998), and among the social skills deficit implicated in interpersonal relationship difficulties is lack of assertiveness (Onyeizugbo, 2003). Humankind is very imperfect communicators and sometimes, this imperfection generates conflict. When faced with difficult situations, animals have two options; flight (non-assertion) or fight (aggression); humankind has a third option - assertiveness, which is essentially a considered response to difficult situations (Bishop, 2010). Assertiveness is being able to express yourself with confidence, without having to resort to passive, aggressive or manipulative behaviours. In conflict situations, one may choose to be passive or aggressive, but an assertive response is invariably the preferable one, and leads to win-win situations where both parties feel good about themselves (Bishop, 2010). Passive and aggressive behaviours often come naturally to human beings, whereas assertive behaviour requires a cognitive process (learning) rather than a gut reaction. In other words, assertiveness encompasses multidimensional aspects of human expression, including behaviour, cognition and affect (Yong, 2010). Behaviourally, assertive individuals are able to express their emotions, defend their goals, and establish favourable interpersonal relationships (Herzberger, Chan & Katz, 1984), while cognitively and affectively assertive individuals can appropriately deal with both positive and negative emotions (Gladding, 1988).

Assertiveness is social boldness and frankness (Rathus, 1973) and reflects people's expression of their genuine feelings, standing up for their legitimate rights, principles, values, goals, preferences and beliefs, as well as refusing unreasonable requests (Nevid & Rathus, 2007; Yong, 2010). Assertive behaviour refers to the ability to make requests; actively disagree; express personal rights and feelings; initiate, maintain or disengage from conversations; and to stand up for self (Rich & Schroeder, 1976). It is the appropriate expression of feelings in ways which do not infringe upon the rights of others (Alberti & Emmons, 2001). Its communication involves respect for the boundaries of oneself and others which presumes an interest in the fulfilment of needs and wants through cooperation (Gottman, 2000). Cassell and Blackwell (2002) maintained that assertiveness exists on a continuum, including positively assertive, non-assertive and negatively assertive. Assertive communication of personal opinions, needs and boundaries has been conceptualized as the behavioural middle ground lying between ineffective passive and aggressive responses (O'Donohue & Fisher, 2008) which emphasizes expressing feelings forthrightly, but in a way that will not spiral into aggression (Goleman, 1996). It is the mid-point in the submissive-aggressive behaviour continuum, and enhances self-esteem, satisfactory interpersonal relationships, and effective conflict management (Onyeizugbo, 2008; Weiten & Lioyd, 2003),

However, assertiveness is often criticized on the premise that it is not practiced in a

balanced way, because it is complex, sensitive and situation-specific (Dalmater & McNamara, 1987). That is, behaviours that are assertive in one circumstance may not be so in another (Argyle, 1981). It is sometimes conceived to imply the attempt to satisfy one's own needs and desires at the expense of the other person(s) being related with (Ojiji, 2009), which manifests in defending one's rights in a given situation and pushing a position favourable to oneself or one's group. More particularly, while unassertiveness courts one set of problems, over-assertiveness creates another (Swiss, 2001), and most often, self-assertion (a determined advancement of one's own rights, claims, opinions, or wishes in a conceited manner) is misconstrued for assertiveness. Assertiveness manuals indicate that many people in a bid to be assertive tend to go too far, beyond basic assertion and escalating assertiveness, thereby readily abusing assertiveness techniques and crossing the assertive threshold bridge. Experts in assertive behaviour research have noted that the appropriateness of an assertion depends on the skill with which it is emitted (Eisler, Hersen, Miller & Blanchard, 1975) and on the extent to which it adheres to the social and cultural norms of the environment in which it is exhibited.

Thus, as a remedy to the problems that stem from assertiveness, there seems to be a need to combine assertiveness with social intelligence in human relations. Social intelligence is required for all types of conflict behaviour, both prosocial and antisocial (Bjorkqvist, Osterman & Kaukiainen, 2000), because it incorporates interpersonal compassion and social concern. It is the ability to act wisely in human relations (Vernon, 1933) as well as understand other people, and how they will react to different social situations (Delic, Novak, Kovacic & Avsec, 2011; Livergood, 2006; Silvera, Martinussen & Dahl, 2001). It is an individual's fund of knowledge about the social world and an ability to comprehend social situations (Honeywill, 2012) for socially successful conduct (Foleno, 2009). It encompasses specific abilities such as perceptiveness of others' internal states and moods, general ability to deal with other people, knowledge about social rules and social life, insight and sensitivity in complex social situations, use of social techniques to manipulate others, perspective taking, and social adaptation (Albrecht, 2006). It is the extent to which one is able to adapt one's behaviour to what is appropriate in any situation.

Social intelligence is simply people's skills. It is an awareness of situations and the social dynamics that govern them, and knowledge of interaction styles and strategies that can help a person achieve his/her objectives in dealing with others. It also involves a certain amount of self-insight and a consciousness of one's own perceptions and reaction patterns (Albrecht, 2006). It may be regarded as an overall construct for understanding how successfully people manage social relationships (Friborg, Barlaug, Martinussen, Rosenvinge & Hjemdal, 2005). However, social intelligence quotient is not a fixed model or attribute (Piaget, 1972), but a complex hierarchy of information-processing skills underlying an adaptive equilibrium between the individual and the environment. An individual can therefore change their social intelligence quotient by altering their attitudes and behaviours in response to their complex social environment. It is closely related to cognition and emotional intelligence and involves cognitive processing and emotional information (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Silvera, Martinussen and Dahl (2001) operationalised social intelligence into a scale (TSIS) containing three distinct components: social information processing (the ability to understand and predict other peoples' behaviours and feelings); social (un)awareness (the tendency to be unaware of or surprised by events in social situations) and social skills (the ability to enter new social situations and social adaptation). The first two factors are related to cognitive aspects of understanding and interpreting ambiguous social information, while the last factor, social skills, is vastly different and relates to positive beliefs about one's social performing abilities. Social intelligence is therefore, the application of social knowledge and skills in social situations for ease of social interactions and one's level of social intelligence could influence one's preferred conflict resolution style.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that assertiveness which is often proffered as a panacea to conflict and ought to promote peaceful co-existence might be detrimental to interpersonal relationships. This is because, individuals in an attempt to be assertive often create more problems

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by being self-assertive. They tend to go too far, particularly when there is divergence of interests, consequently, worsening the situation. On the other hand, one's level of social intelligence might be a factor implicated in the promotion of peaceful resolution or an aggravation of the conflict situation. Hence, the study explored if assertiveness and social intelligence are critical variables in the prediction of preferred conflict resolution styles in a Nigerian sample. In addition, the study aims at contributing information on factors that could be implicated in the evaluation of and selection from the range of strategic options available to conflicting parties in natural settings. It will also contribute to research in this area from African (Nigerian) viewpoint, which will hopefully facilitate comparison across various cultures. Thus, the following hypotheses were postulated and tested - Assertiveness would not significantly predict preference for any of the five conflict resolution styles - threat, acceptance, negotiation, mediation and arbitration and social intelligence (social-information processing, social awareness and social skills) would not significantly predict preference for any of the five conflict resolution styles - threat, acceptance, negotiation, mediation and arbitration.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The study involved 403 undergraduates (248 males and 155 females) selected from Ebonyi State University, Abakiliki, Nigeria, using probability sampling technique. There are four campuses in the university, and two campuses were randomly selected. Using a table of random numbers, two classes were selected from each of four departments, and from the class list, fifty undergraduates and an additional three students were randomly selected from each class. They were mostly single (96) and Christians (97.5). The ethnic groups involved were Igbo ( $n = 333$ ), Hausa ( $n = 8$ ), Yoruba ( $n = 15$ ) and others ( $n = 47$ ). Their ages ranged from 18 to 38 years ( $M = 22.68$ ;  $SD = 3.70$ ).

#### **Instruments**

Three instruments were used in the study, namely: the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS, Rathus, 1973), the Nigerian version of the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) adapted from Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS, Silvera, Martinussen & Dahl, 2001), and the Conflict Scenarios and Rating Scale of Preference for Methods of Conflict Resolution (Ojiji, 1998).

#### *The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS)*

The RAS is a standardized psychological assessment instrument developed by Rathus (1973) and validated for use with Nigerian samples by Anumba (1995). It is a 30-item inventory designed to assess assertive behaviour as a component of personality. The RAS requires participants to describe themselves using a code (3 = very much like me; 2 = rather like me; 1 = slightly like me; -3 = very much unlike me; -2 = rather unlike me; -1 = slightly unlike me). In terms of scoring, more than half of the items (1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 26, 30) are reverse scored, and a sum of the results of the direct and reverse scored items gives the client's overall score, which could range from +90 to -90. Separate norms have been reported for male and female Nigerian samples as follows; males = 48.25, females = 48.61, (Anumba, 1995). The Nigerian norms were the basis for interpreting the scores of the participants. Scores higher than the norms indicate that the client is assertive, while scores lower than the norms indicate non-assertiveness. Previous research showed that RAS has high reliability (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984; Rathus, 1973), and high validity (Takashi, Shiomi, Masako, Ayako, Shinya, Norio & Shoji, 2003). Rathus (1973) reported a split-half reliability coefficient of .77, and an eight-week interval test-retest coefficient of .78, while Anumba (1995) obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of .25 by correlating RAS with Index of Peer Relations (IPR) (Hudson, Nurius, Daley & Newsome, 1986). *The Nigerian version of the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS-IV)*

The Nigerian version of the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS) adapted from the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (TSIS, Silvera, Martinussen & Dahl, 2001) purports to measure three facets of social intelligence; social information processing (SP), social awareness (SA), and social skills (SS). It is a 21-item questionnaire with each factor having seven items. Half of the items are reverse scored,

while responses are scored along a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (describes me extremely poorly) to 7 (describes me extremely well). Gini (2005) reported internal consistency using Cronbach's coefficient alpha .80 for SP, .70 for SA, and .79 for SS. However, for the purpose of this study, responses were scored along a 5-point Likert scale from 5 (very often) to 1 (never). As a result, some of the items that had conjunctions such as 'often' were modified. For instance, item 2 viz; "I often feel that it is difficult to understand others' choices" was changed to "I feel it is difficult to understand others' choices." This was done in a bid to control for social desirability bias as well as reduce language barrier. These semantic labels (Very often; often; sometimes; rarely; never) were attached to each endpoint. The instrument was subjected to face and content validities by 5 Lecturers (two industrial psychologists, one experimental psychologist, one developmental psychologist, and one clinical psychologist) in the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Permission was also obtained from the author on its face and content validation. Two hundred and seventy-one (271) participants drawn from the Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka were involved in the determination of the reliability of the scale in a Nigerian sample. Their responses to the TSIS were subjected to item and factor analyses and internal consistency using Cronbach's coefficient alpha .71, .54, .73, and .76 were obtained for Social information processing (SP) subscale; Social awareness (SA) subscale; Social skills (SS) subscale; and the entire Social intelligence (SI) scale respectively. In terms of scoring, items 2, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 20, and 21, which are negatively worded, are reverse-scored. A sum of the direct and reverse-scored items gives the participant's overall score: the higher the score, the higher the level of social intelligence.

#### ***The Conflict Scenarios and Rating Scale of Preference for Methods of Conflict Resolution***

The third instrument which is the Conflict Scenarios and Rating Scale of Preference for Methods of Conflict Resolution is a standardized psychological instrument developed by Ojiji (1998). It consists of descriptions of two separate conflict scenarios reflecting interpersonal and intergroup conflict situations in which participants assumed principal roles in the conflict described. Each scenario was followed by a full description of five possible methods of resolving the conflict and participants were required to rate the methods on a 7-point scale for preference of usage to resolve the conflict ranging from 7 (most preferable) to 1 (least preferable). The measure was coded in terms of original ratings assigned to methods of resolving conflict (Ojiji, 1998). A sum of the ratings assigned to each method on all the items of a particular conflict scenario forms the participant's preference score for that particular method in the specific conflict situation: the higher the score, the higher the preference for the method. Ojiji (1998) reported an inter-correlation of the ratings for the two types of conflicts done over two periods after a two-week interval as .88 and .84 for threats; .75 and .81 for acceptance of the situation; .90 and .68 for negotiation; .86 and .74 for mediation; and .76 and .83 for arbitration. This indicated a significant and positive relationship between the preference ratings of the methods over the two periods in both conflict situations, which serves as evidence of reliability of the rating scales.

#### **Procedure**

Four hundred and three (403) copies of the questionnaires were administered to participants individually in their classrooms with the aid of five research assistants. The nature of the study was explained to the participants in writing; their sincere responses were sought; and they were sufficiently guided and assisted in completing the questionnaires after eliciting informed consent from them. The instruments were collected immediately after completion.

#### **Design/Statistics**

The study adopted a cross-sectional design. A hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was used for data analysis to test the hypotheses of the study. This is because the research aimed at predicting values on a criterion variable from multiple predictor variables, and regression analysis has predictive relationship ability.

### **Results**

**Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for the five conflict resolution styles**

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	Mean	SD
Threat to the other	12.94	7.12
Accept the situation	18.32	7.00
Negotiation	25.79	7.66
Mediation	26.72	6.57
Arbitration	29.12	8.80

The table of means shows that use of arbitration had the highest mean ( $M=29.12$ ;  $SD=8.80$ ) while threat had the least mean usage ( $M=12.94$ ;  $SD=7.12$ ).

**Table 2: Summary of regression coefficients for assertiveness and social intelligence in preferred conflict resolution styles**

	Threat to the other party			Acceptance			Negotiation			Mediation			Arbitration		
	B	$\beta$	t	B	$\beta$	t	B	$\beta$	T	B	$\beta$	t	B	$\beta$	t
Assertiveness	.02	.05	.86	-.06	-.13	-2.40**	-.06	-.13	-2.48**	.01	.01	.21	.01	.02	.44
Social Info-processing CSP)	-.24	-.13	-2.51**	-.14	.08	1.43	.24	.12	2.34**	.03	.03	.35	-.24	.12	2.25**
Social Awareness (SA)	.08	.04	.83	.02	.01			.12	2.27**	.07	.07	.77	-.07	-.03	-.61
Social Skills (SS)	-.07	-.04	-.67	.05	.03	.50	.01	.01	.11	.04	.04	.38	.01	.01	-.09

Key: \*\* =  $p < .05$ . F-change for threat = 2.68,  $R^2$  change = .04; Acceptance = 2.39,  $R^2$  change = .04; Negotiation = 3.25,  $R^2$  change = .05; Mediation = .28,  $R^2$  change = .00; Arbitration = 1.20,  $R^2$  change = .02

The table indicates that preference for the use of threat was negatively influenced by social-information processing ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t = -2.51$ ,  $p = .01$ ), but was not significantly influenced by other predictor variables. It also shows that preference for acceptance of the situation was negatively influenced by assertiveness ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t = -2.40$ ,  $p = .02$ ) but was not significantly influenced by other predictor variables. In addition, the table shows that preference for negotiation was negatively influenced by assertiveness ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $t = -1.10$ ,  $p = .05$ ); but positively influenced by social-information processing ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $t = 2.34$ ,  $p = .02$ ); and social awareness ( $\beta = .12$ ,  $t = 2.27$ ,  $p = .02$ ). However, its preference was not significantly influenced by social skills. The table further depicts that preference for mediation was not significantly influenced by any of the predictor variables, while preference for arbitration was positively influenced by social information-processing ( $\beta = .12$ ;  $t = 2.25$ ;  $p = .03$ ).

### Discussion

The hypothesis that assertiveness would not significantly predict preference for threat as a conflict resolution style was supported. This finding confirms Eze and Uzuegbunam, (2010); Ojiji, (1998), who found that men and women report least use of threat and imposition in conflict situations. Moreover, the use of threats could be perceived as unassertiveness, which seems to veer more toward verbal aggression. In addition, assertiveness implies self-expression without having to resort to passive, aggressive or manipulative behaviours, which is considered the appropriate response to difficult situations (Bishop. 2010). Hence, the adoption of threat might be a violation of this

assumption.

On the other hand, the hypothesis that assertiveness would not significantly predict preference for accept the situation was not confirmed. This is because assertiveness negatively and significantly predicted preference for acceptance. Thus, as assertiveness increased, preference for accept the situation (avoidance) reduced. This finding could be explained by the tendency to interpret acceptance of the situation as passivity and cowardice, and once an individual expresses a divergent opinion, it implies that the situation is unacceptable. According to Uzoka (1995), people rarely confront issues that need to be settled for good relationship to continue, they may rather withdraw or perhaps deny the existence of the conflict. However, this might not be obtainable in situations where the individuals/parties are highly assertive.

Furthermore, the hypothesis that assertiveness would not significantly predict preference for negotiation was not confirmed, because assertiveness negatively and significantly predicted preference for negotiation. Thus, as assertiveness increased, preference for negotiation reduced. This finding is in line with the findings of Ames and Flynn (2007) who found that assertiveness worsens relationships. This contradicts the goal of negotiation, which advocates for consideration and respect for the boundaries of oneself and others, and presumes an interest in the fulfilment of needs and wants through cooperation (Gottman, 2000). In addition, negotiation may be related to the concepts of inclusion and compromise which students adopted more in resolving conflicts (Eze & Uzuegbunam, 2010), and assertive behaviour though considered effective, justified and appropriate, often carries social costs (Kern, 1982). This is because highly assertive individuals tend to insist on having their expected reinforcement against all odds.

In addition, the hypotheses that assertiveness would not significantly predict preference for mediation and arbitration were supported. This could be explained using the dual-concern theory (e.g. Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992) and motivational orientations (e.g. Messick & McClintock, 1968), which posit that people vary in their attitudes about their own and their conflict partners' outcomes. High self-concern coupled with low-other concern could predispose individuals to adopt a competitive orientation. As a result, may not be willing to input more efforts in seeking the assistance of a mediator or the intervention of an arbitrator in conflict situations. It could also be presumed that assertive behaviour involves the interests of the parties "directly" involved, and seeking the assistance of a third party might deprive one of one's expected reinforcement. On the other hand, the involvement of a third party could be perceived as intrusion, while the decisions of an arbitrator could be seen as impositions by assertive individuals.

The hypotheses that social intelligence would not significantly predict preference for threat, negotiation, or arbitration were not confirmed, while the hypotheses that social intelligence would not significantly predict preference for acceptance and mediation were supported in this study. Social intelligence is made up of three distinct components; social-information processing (ability to understand and predict other peoples' behaviours and feelings); social awareness (tendency to be unaware of or surprised by events in social situations); and social skills (ability to enter new social situations and social adaptation). Social-information processing negatively and significantly predicted preference for threat; positively and significantly predicted preference for negotiation; and positively and significantly predicted preference for arbitration.

Thus, in interpersonal conflict situation, as social-information processing abilities improved, preference for the use of threat diminished, while preference for negotiation increased. This finding could be explained by the assertion that social-information processing is related to the cognitive aspects of understanding and interpreting ambiguous social information (Silvera, Martinussen & Dahl, 2001), and a clear understanding of situational requirements and demands could predispose one to abandon the use of threat and concede to negotiation. In addition, social intelligence centres on tacit knowledge which is socially acquired and increases with experience (Sternberg,

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Forsythe, Hedlund, Snook, Williams, Wagner & Grigorenko, 2000), and one's accurate interpretation of the ambiguous social information perceived disposes one to reduce the use of threat, and seek concession.

Also, as social-information abilities improved, preference for arbitration increased. Thus, its significant influence on preference for arbitration could be explained by the fact that an understanding and accurate interpretation of other peoples' behaviours and feelings might necessitate the involvement of a third party whose word would be law to the parties involved.

In addition, social awareness positively and significantly predicted preference for negotiation. Thus, as social awareness improved, preference for negotiation increased. This could be explained by the notion that social awareness is also related to the cognitive aspects of social intelligence. The tendency of a conflicting party resorting to negotiation, which is similar to inclusion and compromise, is often based on one gaining an insight into the cause(s) and course(s) of disagreement, which could make one more inclined to negotiation. However, this is most likely the case when the conflicting parties have a cooperative orientation (concern about both parties' outcomes). According to the dual-concern theory (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992), high other-concern and low self-concern is assumed to produce concession making, and this orientation is the outcome of an understanding and objective interpretation of what is socially expected and accepted, which stems from social awareness.

On the other hand, social skills did not significantly predict preference for any of the conflict resolution styles. This finding could be explained by the fact that social skills specifically relates to positive beliefs about one's social performing abilities, and not just the act of applying social knowledge and skills in social situations for ease of interactions (Silvera et al., 2001). It focuses on the emotional aspect of social intelligence, rather than the cognitive or behavioural aspects; and one's rating of one's social skills might be prone to social desirability bias. Consequently, it was not a significant factor in predicting preference for conflict resolution styles. On the other hand, subjective ratings of oneself could differ from actions (attitude-behaviour inconsistency).

These findings imply that preference for negotiation which is often seen as an acceptable approach to conflict tends to reduce as assertiveness increases. This simply means that negotiation might not be effective when the parties are highly assertive. However, this finding should be explored, since assertiveness is often proffered as a panacea to conflicts, while highly assertive behaviour does not encourage compromise or concession making. Secondly, social-information processing and social awareness which are components of social intelligence reduce the use of threats, and increase the use of negotiation and/or arbitration in the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Thus, adequate and accurate information processing as well as awareness of socially acceptable behaviours would reduce the use of threat and facilitate negotiation. Therefore, interaction-specific objectives and general social motives that underlie interpersonal conflict behaviours should be taken into consideration in the resolution processes.

In terms of practical implications, assertiveness has been found to be negatively related to acceptance and negotiation. Thus, there is a need to objectively assess the positions of the parties as well as their level of assertiveness, and resolve the conflict in a manner that would not advocate for concession, when they are highly assertive, and at the same time promote a win-win situation. Based on this, one can rightly say that the belief that assertiveness easily escalates to over assertiveness or self-assertion stems from the tendency that highly assertive individuals might not resort to negotiation, because assertiveness insists on one having one's desired reinforcement. Thus, the more assertive they are, the less likely they are to accept the situation or negotiate. Furthermore, there is a need for conflicting parties as well as interveners to take accurate and objective cognizance of the common causes of social disagreements as well

as various individual differences variables that could interfere with the resolution processes in order not to be taken unaware by social events. This would guide the adoption of the most appropriate resolution style.

One limitation of the present study is that the generalizability of the findings may be limited to university undergraduates. Another limitation is in the attribution of relationship to the variables studied. There are other variables such as self-esteem, religion, culture, self-efficacy, exposure and other demographic variables that may bring about differences in preference for conflict resolution styles. These factors could be confounding, variables to the study. An additional limitation exists in terms of the method employed in this research. A purely quantitative method relying on surveys may be inadequate in understanding preferences of people, because preferences are expressed in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Thus, some qualitative methodology which involves interactions with participants would have allowed for direct observation that increases internal validity of the findings, which was quite limited in this study.

It is recommended that in subsequent research, it will be necessary to carry out further studies on the moderating and mediating effects of the individual variables used in this study as well as other demographic, social and personality variables. On the other hand, it would be necessary to incorporate qualitative methodology with quantitative approach in the study of preferences for conflict resolution styles, for better insight.

Summarily, individuals and groups involved in conflict typically have a range of strategic options which they must evaluate and select from and these strategies commonly encompass the categories of threat, acceptance, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration. The present study focused on two factors - assertiveness and social intelligence - that seem to influence preference for conflict resolution styles. The findings showed that assertiveness negatively influenced preference for acceptance (avoidance) and negotiation (compromise), while social-information processing negatively influenced preference for threat and positively influenced preference for negotiation. Also, social information-processing positively influenced preference for arbitration, while social awareness positively influenced preference for negotiation.

It could be concluded that highly assertive individuals are least likely to accept divergent situations or engage in negotiation, while adequate information-processing as well as sufficient social awareness would discourage the use of threat and promote the adoption of negotiation and arbitration.

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