

# Everyday Assertiveness and Its Significance for Overall Mental Well-Being

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**Abstract Background/Purpose** – Every individual has an interpersonal style of communication (aggressive, passive, passive-aggressive, and assertiveness) and the skills that need to be practiced in different situations (language and body language to be maintained), the scope of assertiveness, and areas that serve assertiveness skills for a better physical, mental, and social wellbeing. **Materials/Methods** – A systematic search was conducted using the relevant keywords assertiveness training filtering out for Randomized Controlled trials resulting in 112 articles for the inclusion of this review. 12 articles out of 112, were considered in composing the article. The following database was searched Scopus, Psych INFO, Google Scholar, PubMed, and Research Gate. **Results** – The majority of the studies reported the positive effects of assertiveness training on improving lifestyle. Studies suggested that the quality and intensity of the training program varies with the impact of assertiveness improvement. Studies also showed that there is great improvement seen when assertiveness complements Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), Role-play exercises, and communication skills. **Conclusions** – Beyond improving or inculcating the Assertive skill, the training has a good impact on Self-esteem, Confidence levels of an individual, and interpersonal relationships with a broader impact on mental well-being.

**Keywords** Assertiveness, Passive-Aggressive, Self-Esteem, Schizophrenia, Sexual Assertiveness

## 1. Introduction

Humans, needless to say, communicate their thoughts, feelings, and needs to others determining the situation they correspond to and the person sharing with them. Passiveness is characterized by seeking over-attention to the opinions and needs of others and holding back their views and needs. Like others, the passive is constantly under pressure to think they have no rights [1]. Therefore, they are constantly apologetic and self-conscious about partaking. These individuals often fidget, nod heads, or smile in agreement, lower their voices, and are hesitant when they are ambivalent, leading them to the strategy of conflict avoidance or maintaining low self-esteem. Aggressiveness often characterizes imposing one's opinions or needs on others' dispositioning the rights of others. Aggressive communicators often struggle with a lack of empathy, are interruptive, blame others instead of owning their issues, and lack positive regard or gratitude [2].

Passive-aggressive is a contemporary augmentation to the styles of communication that characterizes passiveness at the surface level but expresses anger or aggression very subtly [1]. Passive aggression and non-assertiveness were intermittent, and people failed to stand up for their rights. Lack of desire to hold responsibility for the problem or conflict and, in turn, involved in aggressive behavior [3]. This array of communicators is stuck being powerless and having difficulty acknowledging their anger. There would be a deliberate diffusion of rumors and sarcastic messages in vulnerable situations. Such a ritual often denies the situation and emotions [4].

Assertiveness is a balance or the middle ground between aggressive and passive communication styles. Assertiveness training was a prominent part of clinical behavior therapy during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1949, Salter published Conditioned Reflex Therapy, the first book on assertiveness training. From figure 1, despite not using the term "assertiveness training," Salter emphasized the need for certain people, especially those he called "inhibitory personalities," to learn how to express themselves more openly [5].

Assertiveness is "standing up for one's rights, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a direct, honest, and appropriate way" [6]. Andrew Salter [7] established and articulated a set of techniques for expressing "positive and negative emotion under circumstances that meet one's needs without infringing on the rights and sensibilities of others"[7]. Assertiveness cannot have a tangible benefit but lies in "personal control and respect." Having communication and self-care created a healthier work environment. Confident communication is improved by respect for self and others [8]. Assertiveness is a skill reinforced and mastered when exchanging the conversation having an awareness of the situation and empathy towards the receiver. Assertiveness also focuses on rejecting unrealistic requests, relieving the self to change their perspective on the situation and mood to express themselves honestly, thereby improving self-esteem [9]. There is a significantly high level of Assertiveness when there is an optimum and healthy level of obesity, Blood Pressure, and Diabetics [10].

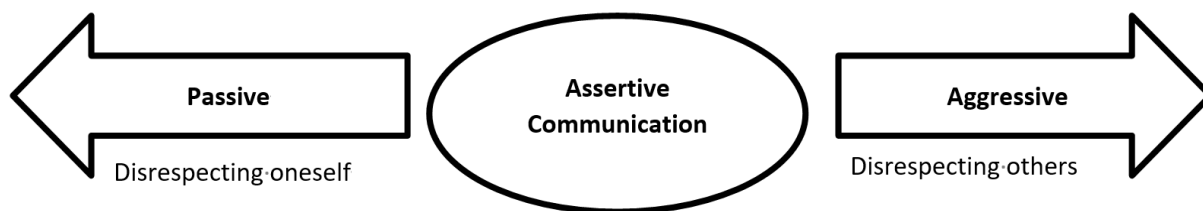
**Self-Expression**

The primary emphasis of Assertiveness is on communication accuracy and respect for all engaged in conversation. Self-expression – Confidently communicating your thoughts, feelings, and desires – including your need for respect, love, and connection – without compromising your rights or feeling anxious [11].

Enabling one to make requests, reject proposals, seek and provide feedback, make demarcations in life, and commendatory feelings (positive emotions, appreciation, praise, gratitude) is critical interpersonal skills to maintain socially appropriate behavior. In the context of relationships, for females who are victims of sexual Assault, Assertiveness training empowers females and contributes to women's decision to withdraw from violent relationships and reduce their exposure to physical, emotional, and sexual violence [12]. Assertive women are often viewed as aggressive, while assertive men are seen as competent and intelligent Pieces of evidence [12], [13].

**Assertiveness and Biology**

Assertiveness training has a long history. It is reviewed based on early research evidence for its use in treating various clinical problems, discusses the current state of assertiveness training, and clinical implementation issues, and discusses how the variables that contribute to unassertiveness. The field of psychotherapy has neglected assertiveness training in recent years, once a highly popular area [5]. Brain scientists or neuroscientists affirm that Assertiveness helps to overcome social skills obstacles having any genetic susceptibility to Social Anxiety, inhibition, or Shyness [14]. Assertiveness skills vary according to age and improve as age and life experiences increase by maximizing biological and social maturity. A functional MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) study may further verify one's rejection as the anterior cingulate cortex and right ventral prefrontal cortex are activated [15]. To a more remarkable degree, Assertion training programs focus on clients' negative self-statements, self-defeating beliefs, and faulty thinking table 1. Assertiveness also concentrates on creating an enduring relationship with healthy emotions and feelings. An altruistic viewpoint would work best with Assertiveness by developing psychological well-being [16].



**Figure 1.** Protecting one’s ideas and boundaries by respecting others in the same way

**Table 1.** Skills to Practice Assertiveness

Skills	Dialogue usage
I Statements	Start the Statement with "I" instead of pointing out others saying "You" [18].
	Say "I disagree," rather than, "You are wrong." If you have a request, say, "I would like you to help with this" rather than, "You need to do this."
Repeated Assertion	Feel comfortable ignoring manipulative verbal side traps, argumentative baiting, and irrelevant logic while sticking to your point. Instead, use calm repetition, say what you want, and stay focused on the issue [18].
	Salesman: <i>"I would like to show you this product currently in trend."</i> You: <i>"No, thank you, I'm not interested."</i>
	Salesman: <i>"I have a great range to offer you."</i> You: <i>"That may be true, but I'm not interested at the moment."</i>
	Salesman: <i>"Is there someone else here who would be interested in these products?"</i> You: <i>"I would want to help you, but I don't know whom I can suggest to you"</i>
	Salesman: <i>"OK, would you take this brochure and think about it?"</i> You: <i>"Yes, I will take a brochure."</i>
	Salesman: <i>"Thank you."</i> You: <i>"You're welcome."</i>
Assertive Inquiry	Seeks out criticism about yourself in close relationships by promoting the expressions of honest, negative feelings to improve communication. Clarify your understanding of those criticisms, and use the information if it will be helpful or ignore if it is manipulative.
	<i>"I would like to know by what time I would receive the project."</i> <i>"May I know when I Hurt you?"</i> <i>"Are you saying that you're having a difficult time at home is the reason for postponing the project"</i>
Fogging	Acknowledge the criticism, agree that there may be some truth to what they say, but remain the judge of choice of action.
	<i>"I agree that there are probably times when I don't give you answers to your questions."</i> <i>"I agree that there are times when I was rude to people."</i>
Workable Compromise	You can always bargain for your material goals unless the compromise affects your personal feelings of self-respect. Then, make it into a win-win situation.
	<i>"I understand that you need to talk, and I need to finish what I'm doing."</i> <i>So, what about meeting in half an hour?"</i>
Constructive Feedback	Expression is respectful, and it separates the behavior from the person, as opposed to attacking their entire being [19].
	<i>"You're so selfish"</i> is replaced with: <i>"I feel you are only thinking of your own needs here,"</i> or <i>"I don't think that you are considering me at all in this"</i>
Assertive Empathy	Effective in caring relationships because the listener is more likely to accept your assertion when s/he feels you have some understanding and respect for her/him.
	Use the phrase <i>"I understand how you are feeling."</i> <i>"I can see the incident has disturbed you."</i>
Content to Process Shift	When someone is trying to confuse the issue. Stop talking about the problem and bring up instead, how the other person is behaving RIGHT NOW.
	<i>"You're getting off the point. I'm starting to feel frustrated because I feel like you're not listening."</i>
Defusing	Letting someone cool down before discussing an issue. Also, if others try to stay with it, you have the right to walk away, making sure to discuss and give closure to the issue later [18].
	<i>"I can see that you're upset. Let's talk about this later."</i>
Negative Assertion	Free information about yourself that you agree is negative. However, it also communicates that you accept yourself as a person despite this negative trait or behavior. When you accept yourself as you are--warts and all--others find it difficult to manipulate you based on their criticism of your negative traits [18].
	<i>"Yes, you're right. I don't always listen closely to what you have to say."</i> <i>"I have Anger issues and get angry over silly things very easily."</i>
Saying "No"	Saying "No" is difficult, but it will help you in retaining your autonomy. When you say 'No,' try not to apologize or explain yourself for that rejection. Keep control over your anxiety, have good posture, stand straight, and speak confidently [18].
	<i>"Can we meet some other day for lunch?"</i> (When you cannot say No directly) <i>"I'm glad for the invitation, but I think I cannot enjoy such parties."</i> <i>"I'll think about the tour and let you know"</i> (If you do not wish to reject them right away, ask for some time to think) [19]
Scripting	When it is hard to put your feelings across clearly and confidently to someone when you need to assert yourself, prepare what you want to say in advance, using a four-pronged approach that describes: your needs, feelings, events, and consequences [20].
Self-Disclosure	Assertively disclosing information about yourself--how you think, feel, and react to the other person's free information--allows social communication to flow both ways [20].

For effective communication, exhibit interest in the conversation of the opposite person by preserving rapport and Assertive Listening- Valuing and understanding others' needs and opinions and being respectful towards them. There are two levels of conversation. Firstly, conversation at the level of content- "what you say" and, secondly, the conversation at the level of emotions- "the way you say it." Prof. Albert Mehrabian (1970) [17] gave a pathbreaking model that characterizes Human Conversation with an eye toward the impression and feelings expressed in the conversation through body language and tone of voice. He stated it as the Mehrabian Model that quantifies the impact of non-verbal communication as the 7-38-55 model [17].

- "7% of the message about feelings and attitudes is in words.
- 38% of the message is attributable to feelings and attitudes in the voice.
- 55% of the message is attributable to feelings and attitudes in facial expression, posture, and gestures" [17].

Some non-verbal cues help to have an effective conversation. For example, owning an open posture while being a part of the conversation, nodding, making good eye contact, smiling, and maintaining the pace. For instance, if the speaker slows the tone, the receiver can be calm and soft in conversation; if the person is happy and enthusiastic, the partner can also maintain the same mood and emotion [3].

### Assertiveness and Self-Esteem

Internal and external factors are common causes of drug use. Internal factors include mental stress, tension, curiosity, and boredom which lead to addiction. Furthermore, External factors include peer influence, poor nurturing, and School or college environment. Low self-esteem (misbelief in one's abilities) can be a significant reason for drug use. Children of parents who are in substance use become victims of depression and stress. Thus, children often experience a lower level of happiness and life satisfaction. In addition, there are fewer opportunities to resist unwanted marriages to girls from rural backgrounds. Thus, assertiveness skill training in groups with substance-abusive parents can increase happiness levels and improve adolescents' sense of ego identity with non-addictive parents [22]. Through Assertiveness training, developing socio-cognitive abilities with parents, peers, or others would help improve their self-esteem [23]

## 2. Methodology

The article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature on Assertiveness Training. A systematic search was conducted using the relevant

keywords Assertiveness training filtering out for Randomized Controlled trials resulting in 112 articles for the inclusion of this review. 12 articles out of 112, were considered in composing the article. The following database was searched Scopus, Psych INFO, Google Scholar, PubMed, and Research Gate. The search was performed using keywords, Assertiveness skills, and Assertiveness training. The search was limited to articles published between 2013 and 2023 to ensure the inclusion of recent studies.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Assertiveness and Self-Esteem

Internal and external factors are common causes of drug use. Internal factors include mental stress, tension, curiosity, and boredom which lead to addiction. Furthermore, External factors include peer influence, poor nurturing, and School or college environment. Low self-esteem (misbelief in one's abilities) can be a significant reason for drug use. Children of parents who are in substance use become victims of depression and stress. Thus, children often experience a lower level of happiness and life satisfaction. In addition, there are fewer opportunities to resist unwanted marriages to girls from rural backgrounds. Thus, assertiveness skill training in groups with substance-abusive parents can increase happiness levels and improve adolescents' sense of ego identity with non-addictive parents [22]. Through Assertiveness training, developing socio-cognitive abilities with parents, peers, or others would help improve their self-esteem [23].

Self-esteem is the belief in one's abilities or capabilities. An individual with Low self-esteem is considered a severe Mental health issue that detracts an individual physically and mentally. An individual with low self-esteem becomes passive in his communication style, and there would be academic failures and a lack of confidence. When low self-esteem is chronic, there is a chance of increased anxiety, depression, self and social isolation, relationships (romantic and non-romantic) problems, and educational and occupational performances [24]. Improvement in self-esteem and positive self-evaluation may be the primary cause of assertiveness acquisition, emphasizing that individuals evaluate themselves depending on the situation [15], [25]. Assertiveness training helps build cognizance of social skills and situational empathy building improvements in a person's rights to express their views, thoughts, and feelings comfortably without harming others or oneself [24].

### 3.2. Assertiveness and Interpersonal Relations

Interpersonal relationships are any association or

affiliation between 2 or more individuals that are characterized by communication overtly (handshakes, walking together, facial expressions, and body language while communicating) and covertly (mental processes or cognition, memory retrieval) [26]. A formal and informal way to share any information with a receiver is with empathy and respect [27]. Parental acceptance and rejection impact children's interpersonal relationships [15]. Thus, Assertiveness empowers individuals to sustain a unique pattern of maintaining respect for themselves and others.

Domestic violence is violence that occurs between two intimate partners. *Violence* is a natural urge that manifests as destructive or constructive behavior directed at oneself or others. Violence can often be physical and verbal; at the same time, it can be emotional too. During emotional abuse, guilt is experienced by the partner in emotionally vulnerable situations. Through assertiveness training for husbands, it is noticed that there is an increased ability in Assertiveness through training skills like empathy, and expressing their needs in a healthy tone, thereby reducing the risk of Domestic Violence [28].

The sexual assault would be high with the risk of becoming a victim when there is a lack of sexual Assertiveness. In addition, social anxiety can be a cause for becoming sexual victimization. 'Assertive resistance strategies' and 'behavioral rehearsal' may help the victims to improve their self-efficacy [29]. Albert Bandura says Self-efficacy is people's belief in their capabilities to produce desired effects through their actions [30]. Assertiveness improves risk reduction programs (self-harm, toxic relationships, sexual assault, peer influence on drugs) through behavioral rehearsals regardless of gender and ethnicity.

### 3.3. Assertiveness and Clinical Symptoms

Schizophrenia is a psychotic disorder characterized by disturbances in thought, emotion, and behavior—disordered thinking, in which ideas are not logically related; faulty perception and attention; a lack of emotional expressiveness or, at times, inappropriate expressions; and disturbances in movement [31]. Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) complementing Assertive Training (AT) helps build social relations, like problem-solving skills and conflict management, which in turn, reduces the anxiety of schizophrenia patients when having social interactions [9]. Schizophrenia has a risk of experiencing violent behavior. Losing control over oneself or others (injuring oneself and others) AT helps to disagree with the request without hurting others and maintain mutual respect. Assertive behavior is one of the best ways to express resentment without harm [32]. AT focused on identifying anger

triggers, asserting needs and desires, rejecting requests, and accepting others' views. Similarly, it also focuses on CBT improving positive aspects, automated thoughts, change in negative behavior, and utilizing Support systems [9].

Depression is also called Major Depressive Disorder in DSM-5. The symptoms of depressed mood and loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities persistently for at least two weeks. Insomnia, fatigue, guilt, and psychological agitation are other symptoms of depression [33]. Furthermore, based on the characteristics of communication (Aggressive, Passive, Passive-aggressive, and assertive), the subjects undergo Assertive training. Subjects learned to express their rejection by saying 'No' to unreasonable requests, conveying their expectations and discomforts, having consistent awareness of their mood and thoughts, and having a healthy management style of Emotions. Implementation of CBT or Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) with Assertiveness training on clinical depression patients aids in better outcomes in social skills [34]. Psychotherapy interventions involving assertiveness and social skills training are equally effective when compared to other CBT interventions for depression and social anxiety [5].

### 3.4. Role of Assertiveness Training

Although unassertiveness is a key client characteristic in anxiety, depression, and substance abuse disorders, assertiveness training is not a primary treatment. A more medicalized approach to treating psychological problems was adopted by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in the 1980s [5], rather than a psychosocial model. As a result, funding priorities shifted away from research on assertiveness and other transdiagnostic variables (e.g., perfection and procrastination) [5]. Initially, the problem or behavior that needs attention in an Interpersonal Situation is identified. Furthermore, in figure 2, the belief or attitude contributing to the unassertive behavior will be identified, confronted, and replaced with an assertive one. With continuous practice and perseverance, assertiveness becomes comfortable with daily life. Considering situations or people where assertiveness becomes easy during the initial stages increases the practice in uncomfortable situations and improves confidence [21]. In assertive communication, the content and form must be clear and concise. The categories, like request, command, or refusal, always depend on the speaker's tone and fluidity and are characterized by reasonableness. To ensure a positive response, let's use a respectful tone when making the request, while still making it clear what we'd like.

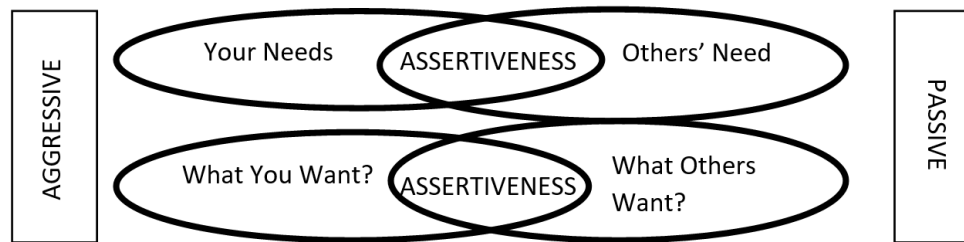


Figure 2. Assertiveness falls between Needs and Wants

## 4. Discussion

The study conducted a comprehensive review of 12 articles that met the inclusion criteria, supplemented by relevant books and additional literature. These articles encompassed diverse populations, including adolescents, adults, and specific groups such as individuals with clinical symptoms (e.g., social anxiety, depression, schizophrenia), housewives, working professionals, and both victims and perpetrators of abusive relationships. The collective findings from these studies consistently demonstrated the positive impact of assertiveness training on enhancing various aspects of individuals' lives. Specifically, assertiveness training was associated with improvements in lifestyle, self-esteem, confidence levels, and interpersonal relationships. The effectiveness of assertiveness training programs was found to vary based on factors such as the quality and intensity of the training, as well as the inclusion of complementary approaches like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), role-play exercises, and communication skills training.

Furthermore, the review highlighted the broader implications of assertiveness training on mental well-being, emphasizing its role in promoting psychological health and resilience. However, despite the overall positive outcomes observed, certain limitations were noted across the studies, including small sample sizes, lack of long-term follow-up, and limited opportunities for practical application and skill practice. It is crucial to acknowledge the potential impact of individual factors such as self-awareness on the effectiveness of assertiveness training. Individuals who lack self-awareness may experience challenges in fully engaging with and benefiting from assertiveness skills development. In summary, while assertiveness training shows promise as a valuable intervention for improving assertiveness skills and overall well-being, further research is needed to address existing limitations and enhance the effectiveness of these programs across diverse populations and contexts.

### 4.1. Nexus between Assertiveness and Mental Health Well-being

Everyday assertiveness plays a crucial role in bolstering overall mental well-being. It fosters self-esteem by allowing individuals to confidently express their needs and opinions, leading to a sense of self-worth and respect. This

newfound confidence translates into improved interpersonal relations. By effectively communicating boundaries and expectations, individuals build healthier connections marked by mutual respect and understanding. Additionally, assertiveness acts as a shield against depression. By preventing the build-up of frustration and resentment due to unexpressed needs, it empowers individuals to navigate challenges effectively, reducing the risk of feeling overwhelmed and hopeless, which are hallmarks of depression. Therefore, everyday assertiveness becomes a cornerstone for a healthy mind and a fulfilling life.

## 5. Future Recommendations

The researcher's recommendations for future research highlight several key areas that warrant further investigation in the field of assertiveness training:

- 1) **Development of Training Programs:** Invest in the development and evaluation of assertiveness training programs tailored to different settings, including schools and workplaces. These programs should be designed to equip individuals with the necessary skills to navigate interpersonal interactions effectively and promote mental health and well-being.
- 2) **Workplace Mental Health Promotion:** Advocate for the inclusion of assertiveness training as part of workplace mental health promotion and prevention strategies. By offering assertiveness training to employees, organizations can foster a supportive work environment, enhance interpersonal relationships, and mitigate the risk of stress-related issues.
- 3) **Cultural and Contextual Factors:** Investigate the influence of cultural and contextual factors on the relationship between assertiveness and mental health. Recognizing the diversity of cultural norms and social dynamics can inform the development of culturally sensitive assertiveness training interventions that resonate with diverse populations.
- 4) **Mediating Variables:** Explore mediating variables that may moderate the relationship between assertiveness training and mental health outcomes. Variables such as leadership competencies,

Emotional Awareness, self-confidence, and relationship management skills may play a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of assertiveness training programs.

- 5) **Large-Scale Trials:** Implement large-scale randomized controlled trials to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of assertiveness training interventions. By employing robust research methodologies, researchers can provide empirical evidence supporting the benefits of assertiveness training for mental health and overall functioning.

By addressing these recommendations, future research endeavors can advance our understanding of assertiveness training and its role in promoting mental health and interpersonal effectiveness across various settings and populations.

## 6. Conclusions

Through the analysis of articles, Assertiveness Training can be carried out for individuals with Drug use as a reciprocal inhibition with peer pressure, maintaining healthy interpersonal boundaries with family, intimate partners, and other social groups. This training lends a hand to women in making vibrant and precise boundaries by being sexually assertive; men also can express their needs and get detached from their violent behavior. Through Assertiveness training, negative symptoms can be managed in clinical disorders like Depression and Schizophrenia by complementing other therapies like CBT (Cognitive Behavior Therapy) or REBT (Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy). Assertiveness training assists clinical patients to avoid becoming more aggressive or violent towards themselves and others by maintaining respect, which builds confidence and self-esteem.

## Declarations

The Author declares that there is no Conflict of interest in composing the article. There is NO Data for review as the manuscript is composed as a Review Paper providing enough facts justifying the title.

## Author Contributions

Shivani Jandhyala gathered and composed an original manuscript preparation, Literature review, conceptualization, methodology, and discussion. Dr. Navin Kumar review-editing and writing. All authors have read and approved the published on the final version of the article

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Approval

The article doesn't have any human participants but is composed article through secondary data, thus ethical committee is not required.

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