

## Experience Acute Stress Reactions Among Men, Participants of Road Traffic Accidents (RTA)

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**Abstract:** The objective of the work is to study personal experience component of life threatening events and coping strategies among men, participants in road traffic accident. Basic beliefs, life-meaning orientations, subjective perception of time as personal experiences of accident are interrelated with active coping strategies with the ability to assimilate new experience, change the existing concept of the world at a relevant principle of reality. The choice of active coping strategies by examinees is associated with cognitive assessment of life threatening events as they can overcome their own or with help of others as well as with the possibility to find the meaning in a life threatening event with the ability to appreciate and benefit past experiences with positive self image. It is identified criteria of ineffective experience of traffic accident by person: loss of meaning of life, the lack of goals and prospects for the future, perception about the time “time does not exist”, “time has stopped”, negative subjective perception of time, fear, despair and indifference in the look of the future.

**Key words:** Life-threatening event, experience of the accident, experience of coping strategies, basic beliefs, time has stopped

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### INTRODUCTION

Recent years, increasing interest to inner life is observed in psychology, to the fact as different life events are refracted in it, especially associated with knowledge of their own mortality (K.A. Abulhanova-Slavskaya, S.L. Rubenshtein, B.G. Ananyev, N.A. Loginova, L.I. Antsyferova, T.B. Kartseva, V.I. Kovalev, R.A. Akhmerov, K.V. Karpinskiy). The majority of both domestic and foreign psychologists take the view that life threatening events are the premise of significant personality changes that can be can as positive (constructive, creative, integrating) as negative (destructive, ruinous, disconnecting).

From the point of view of “event-trigger biographical approach” (V.N. Ukrainets, L.V. Sokhan, E.I. Golovakha, A.A. Kronik, L.E. Shklyar), the psychological fate of

person is described by experience of life events. Over the recent decades, an increase of various anthropogenic Extreme Situations (ES) is observed. Both in practice and in scientific researches the great attention is paid to mental disease and behavior disorders developing in more distant period of psychological traumatic experience such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and adaptation disorder. At the same time, little attention is paid to analysis of the period of Acute Stress Response (ASR), personal experience during first week after ES.

The study of problems of people experience of road traffic accidents was launched by foreign authors in the 1990s (Bulman, 1998). Domestic scientists began to consider these issues only recent years (Shemchuk *et al.*, 2004). Currently, there is few data of RTA experience by person at a young age (20-25 year) as life-threatening events, about changes of personal component and applied coping strategies.

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According to B.G. Ananyev at the present time self-consciousness is eventually moulded to 23-25 year. Hence, it can be assumed that this age is quite sensitive to the effects of negative life events. The RTA considers a clash with the threat of his own life and as a result, makes increased demands to individuals. Therefore, the definition of relationship between activity of coping strategies and RTA experience efficiency is essential for the development of appropriate psychological programs.

The goal of research is to explore the personal component of life-threatening events experience and coping strategies among men, participants of RTA.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research was conducted over a period of two years (2009-2010); research was carried out on an individual basis; results of researches were discussed in the two meetings with each observable person.

Sample of examinees consisted of 60 men, who faced with a life-threatening event (2 week after RTA) and at the time of research were in traumatology department on treatment. All examinees during RTA experienced intense fear for their life, felt its instantaneity and the proximity of death. Sample of examinees was formed on the base of following criteria experienced RTA 2 weeks ago higher or unfinished higher education age 20-25 year old (average age 22, 5 year).

The following blocks of psychognostic techniques were used in the research: Questionnaire "World Assumptions Scale" in adaptation of M.A. Padun, A.V. Kotelnikova was chosen to define the basic conceptions of individual changes (like a personal component of RTA experience) as a result of a life-threatening event (Padun and Tarabrina, 2003; Padun and Kotelnikova, 2008). Methodology of determining life meaning orientations (adaptation of D.A. Leontiev) (Leontiev *et al.*, 1993) was chosen with a view to search semantic areas as personal component of RTA experience. This method allows to evaluate the "source" of meaning of life that can be found by a man in the future (purpose) or in the present (process) or in the past (result) or in all three components of life. Methodology of J. Amirkhan "Indication of coping strategies" in adaptation of N.A. Sirota was chosen with a view to determine leading (active or passive) coping strategy of RTA participants and allows to define three basic Coping Strategies (CS) of personality: Resolution of Problems (RP), search for Social Support (SSP), Avoiding Problems (AP) (Ilyin, 2004). Projective technique "Man in the rain" (E. Romanova and T. Sytko) by allowing to define the style of coping behaviour (active or passive), adaptive capacity and tolerance of the person at a

life-threatening event (RTA) (Evstigneeva and Kudzilov, 2004). Technique "Draw the time" (L.P. Enkova). The technique allows in the symbolic form (sign) to imagine actual idea of time for examinees and also their relations with the time (Kadyrov and Kravtsov, 2009; Strelkov, 2003; Snegireva, 1995). Uncertainty of stimulation, lack of restrictions in the choice of responses, lack of assessment of answers-all these features that are typical for projective techniques allow to reveal cognitive and unknown in a symbolic content of the respondent consciousness. Questionnaire and non-standardized directed interview for the participants of RTA. In connection with purposes and objectives of the search we have developed the questionnaire and interviews, the purpose of that was to find out experience of examinees involved in RTA and possible changes in personal human component (basic beliefs, attitudes about their own security, rethinking their life, re-evaluating values, attitude to time, etc). Questionnaire consists of 5 blocks:

**General information:** General information about RTA participant (age, gender, education, marital status, family composition, subjective assessment of sleep and mood quality at the research time.

**Participation in RTA:** Subjective assessment of life threatening event; factors that have had the greatest acute effect; the feelings experienced at the time of the accident and immediately after it.

**Changing of basic beliefs as a result of a clash with a life threatening event, includes 8 issues:** Subjective assessment of change of their beliefs about the world as a result of the accident, about themselves, luck, verifiability and justice of the world. Changing of the meaning and feeling of security as a result of a life-threatening event includes 8 issues (changing perceptions about the meaning of life, death, about themselves, their security from the perspective of the respondent). Indicators of meaning orientation on the past, present and future are considered in the questionnaire through the question "Which of the following judgments do you agree?" Answers: "The time I live now is my time"; "My time has gone"; "My time has not yet come".

Subjective change of time perception as a result of RTA includes 5 issues (on the focus respondents to the past, present or future, presence of prospects; what does the time mean for examinees). The results were processed by using the SPSS program, Version 19 for windows. To assess the accuracy of compared values, Mann-Whitney nonparametric U-test and the criterion of Ansari-Bradley and correlation analysis were used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Basic beliefs, life meaning orientation, subjective time perception and coping strategies among men, participants of RTA: Analysis of results of the questionnaire and interviews identified that RTA was a life-threatening event for examinees because they appraised it as meaningful event for them that divided their life on the “before” and “after” road accident it was associated with necessity of taking a decision the RTA caused subjective changing of perception of the environment and social situation, lifestyle and personality it was a real threat to life and made them to think about the end of life, death and the meaning of life and indirectly confirmed by psychognostic techniques (“world assumptions scale”, “life meaning orientations” and “indication of coping strategies”).

As a result of RTA, 60 of men (100%) felt the destruction of security sense. Among them, 70% (42 of men) has noted that after the accident they stopped feeling invulnerable. Now they realize that at any point in life they cannot be completely safe, so they must be more responsible and 30% (18 of men) said that after the accident they began feel the lack of self-confidence and self-assurance, causeless alarm; there is a sense that something unpleasant might happen to them.

Psychological system of invulnerability is a protective design that protects the “ego” from the threat of nonbeing. M.Sh. Magomed-Eminov denotes this fundamental psychological system as invulnerability paradigm. That is before the RTA examinees believed that “death is somewhere far away, beyond the horizon and today they are young, healthy and there is prosperous future ahead”. Clash of respondents with the threat to life placed in one semantic dimension the life and death. Reputedly men have formed another existential position based on psychological defensive constructions: some experienced increase of responsibility, others got fatalism and obedience to the fate, when a man is not obsessed events taking place in his life.

After the accident, most men also changed basic beliefs which is reflected in: attitude to people (75% said that their attitude has improved: “people have become closer, began to appreciate them more than earlier” and 25% said that attitude became worse: “indifference, alertness, detachment has arisen”); in trust to people (70% notes increased confidence to people and 30% of men have become to trust people less); the ability to control the events of life (before the disaster, all men considered that they were able to control the events of their life but after the accident, 36 of men (60%) expressed such perceptions); in the view of their own luck (70% of men noted that they were “lucky to survive” and 30% said that they were “very unlucky to get in an accident, they are losers”), etc.

Thus, an average of 42 of men (70%) demonstrated basic beliefs that characterized for effective experience of life-threatening events as follows, the belief in benevolence, justice, world, controllability, their luck and positive self image. Techniques “World Assumptions Scale” (WAS), “Life Meaning Orientations” (LMO) and “Indication of Coping Strategies” (ICS) allowed to get results evidencing that before the life-threatening event (RTA) men more or less preferred to consider themselves as rather immortal than mortals, chose to believe in regularity and meaningfulness of existence, tried to make their world view more secure well-defined. The 30% of them often do not think about the possible consequences of drunk driving or speeding up. They had had accidents before but they claim these were not as severe and they had not re-evaluated anything in their life. Clash of the respondents with RTA, that was accompanied by a strong fear for their life, feeling of its transiency, close to death, reputedly caused the cognitive assessment that can be defined as an individual activity, aimed at recognition of characteristics of occurred event, identification of negative and positive sides, defining its meaning and value. In this case, from the research of cognitive assessment supposedly depended the coping strategies used.

The success of coping behavior is determined by cognitive resources such as positive self-concept, intelligence and creativity, advanced perception of social support, confidence in the ability to control existing events. Belief in benevolence of the world, its justice, luck, positive self-image, ability to control-all these are typical for 70% of the men injured in a traffic accident. Accordingly, in this case we can assume effective cognitive evaluation event that presumably has determined the choice of active coping strategies.

Under the influence of RTA the basic beliefs of respondents have undergone changes, destructed familiar life attitudes and behaviors, concepts of the world because there was a threat on right to life, on personal prosperity.

Based on the views of R. Janoff-Bulman, results received from the majority of respondents can be appraised as an opportunity for these examinees to convert old and comfortable basic beliefs that by confronting with a life-threatening event proved to be an illusion and make them more relevant to the principle of reality. That is presumable among the most men, injured in accident have had a reconstruction of basic beliefs: they changed qualitatively and recovered only to a level that liberated respondents from the illusion of their own invincibility, obliging to think about the need to be more responsible.

About changing of the meaning of RTA participants, restructuring of personal meanings indicated that 60 of men began to reflect on the meaning of life, death, began

to feel themselves older after the accident. The 42 of persons (70%) concluded: “we must value our life, think more about our safety”, “death can occur suddenly”, “Feel the taste of life”. The accident occurred gave a positive experience that helped them change the attitude towards life, towards themselves, to see the sense in many things that previously had been unavailable and 30% said: “thought about the pointlessness of life has been persistently haunts me”, “negative life event, resulting serious consequences”. Among most men, high meaningfulness of life was observed, both in the present, future and past. These examinees consider that their life is mostly in their hands and they can manage it, despite what happened. 70% of men left the accident in the past and they regard it as a positive life experience, since now they can build their lives in the present and future more efficiently.

Therefore, semantic processing of life-threatening event and its proper inclusion into semantic context is the main task of the psyche. In this case, the accident occurred supposedly led to the formation of new leading semantic entities among the most men. Current semantic condition is expressed in the meaning of perception events in the past, present and future, herewith for examinees the present is coming out on the first plan (70% of men) as the most emotionally rich and productive with hope for future.

To better understand the subjective perception of time and coping strategies among men, participants of RTA, data of projective techniques should be used.

As the results of the technique “Man-Man in the rain”, 42 of men (70%) consider that the figures show the active ways of coping with a life threatening event, expressed in the following criteria: improving the aesthetics of the image (73%), increasing the size of the image (93%), location of the picture relative to the center (73%), a style of human behavior in the rain (the man stands or moves-53%), person’s sex transformation on male in the rain (66%) and the availability of protection means from the rain (86%) the use of three or more colors during drawing (73%), the character of rain-drizzle (weak drizzle) (60%). On this basis, it can be assumed that as a result of an accident men were guided by their own resources to overcome it, strove for it actively. Adequate choice of overcoming strategies largely depend on the person’s ability to assess the nature of the event and the assessment, in turn, is caused by the person’s ability to control event and modify it as well as by a positive image of themselves that is well-developed coping resources. Analysis of images showed that 70% of men possess this ability.

About the availability of passive ways of coping with a life-threatening event among part of the examinees, we can assume on the basis that there are inferior of picture aesthetics among 16 of men (27%), 5 of men (7%) decrease

**Table 1: Data of questionnaire and technique “draw the time”**

| Opinion about the time   | Quantity of examinees |
|--|-----------------------|
| The substantive content of the image <sup>a</sup>                        |                       |
| Time is the present, past and the future <sup>a</sup>                    | 15                    |
| “Time is the movement”   | 17                    |
| “Time is the life”   | 10                    |
| “Formal idea of time”  | 18                    |
| The physical content of the image  |                       |
| Positive attitude to the time  | 42                    |
| Negative attitude to the time  | 18                    |
| Attitude to the time based on the results of questionnaire and interview |                       |
| The time when I live now, it’s my time                                   | 42                    |
| My time has gone the best left there before accident                     | 14                    |
| My time has not yet come   | 4                     |

of the picture size, 47% of men consider that a person is standing in the rain, running out, or sitting in a puddle; 27% that figure is shifted from the center, 33% sex transformation on the female of a person in the rain, 53% paint in the rain more youngest person or child, 27% used no more than two colors in a figure, 14% there is no protection from the rain, 60% of examinees painted the puddles, 40% of examinees drawn a person caught in a heavy rain (downpour).

These men avoid reality, related to an accident, feel their own powerlessness, subjectively appraise the event occurred as excessive, feel unable to resist it; feel inner discomfort, lost their inner “rod” have a female style of behavior when confronted with the threat to life (passivity, desire to escape from the independent taking decision, to shift responsibility onto others).

Results of the technique “draw the time” and questionnaire revealed (Table 1), on the one hand, the existence of temporal perspective and on the other hand, it’s narrowness, restriction by events of near future (past), negative attitudes to time among 30% of men, participants in a traffic accident.

Not only pictures but answers to the questions (questionnaire) were indicative of temporal focus on the past, present or future as well: 18 of men involved in an accident could not give preference to any one form of time. This fact is confirmed by results of projective techniques “draw the time” where these respondents indicated the time perspective as “time does not exist”. Their drawings speak of formal, “blurred” vision of time. According to the three-level concept of time, these examinees image the time as dot (no connection between past, present and future). This may mean that they do not associate themselves with the present and don’t see any future prospect. The negative attitude to time is observed among them. Subjective perception of time among examinees resulted from the accident have changed in the direction of fatalism in regard to the present and to hopeless, helpless and devoid of meaning future. Other

participants of the pilot group are oriented towards the future (53.4%) and at the present (16.6%). Despite the fact that 70% of men are focused on the future and herewith considers the past as positive experience, divided their lives into two phases: before the accident and after the accident (based on the results of the questionnaire). On this basis we can assume that most of men who faced the accident as a life-threatening event, perceives time as meaningful, continuously running from the past to the future through the present, noted their positive attitude to time. It is said that they have actual semantic condition associated with meaningfulness of the past, present and future. Not only the present influences on the future but in turn, certain expectations and perceptions about the future effect human behavior in the present. Positive expectations of men towards future gave their present value, negative-devalued it.

**The relation of personal component experience of RTA and coping strategies among men, participants of RTA:**

The correlation analysis on the techniques of "World Assumptions Scale" (WAS), "Life Meaning Orientations" (LMO) and "Indication of Coping Strategies" (ICS) revealed the contingency between the results of the following scales: "Purpose in life" at the 1% level have a direct link with the scales "Process of life" ( $g = 0.737$ ), "The result of life" ( $g = 0.775$ ), "Locus of control is me" ( $g = 0.682$ ), "Locus of control is life" ( $g = 0.733$ ), "Benevolence of the world" ( $g = 0.714$ ), "Justice of the world" ( $g = 0.659$ ), "The image of me" ( $g = 0.734$ ), "Fortune" ( $g = 0.792$ ) "Control" ( $g = 0.719$ ), "Problem solving" ( $g = 0.568$ ) and 1% at the level-feedback with a scale of "Avoiding problems" ( $g = -0.707$ ).

Thus, the data of correlation analysis showed the relation between coping strategies and efficiency of road traffic accident experiences and allows to suggest that at the time of the life-threatening event, participants were aware of their mortality and RTA has prompted them to view their lives activity of coping strategies linked with the value of respondent experience of coping with difficult situations use of active coping strategies by examinees in a traffic accident is interconnected with the following personal acquisitions:

- Life-threatening event as an opportunity to experience the trust and intimacy in relation to other people and the world at large. Breaking own fear connected with possibility of death, the examinees discovered a better existence
- Life-threatening event as finding the meaning of life. Traffic accident through the threat to life and limb of life has forced respondents to turn to their own life, in particular to one its component-meaning

Table 2: Results of testing of hypothesis of homogeneity of techniques "World Assumptions Scale" (WAS), "Life Meaning Orientations" (LMO) and "Indication of Coping Strategies" (ICS) in groups "Effective experience of traffic accident" (EE of RTA) and "Ineffective experience of traffic accident" (IE of RTA)

| Scale                                   | U      | Z       |
|---|--------|---------|
| Goal in life                            | 60.500 | -2.805* |
| Process of life                         | 80.000 | -2.192* |
| Efficiency of life                      | 70.500 | -2.489* |
| Locus of control-Me                     | 69.000 | -2.544* |
| Locus of control-life                   | 75.000 | -2.350* |
| General index of meaningfulness of life | 79.500 | -2.205* |
| Benevolence of the world                | 87.500 | -1.956* |
| Justice of the world                    | 55.500 | -2.969* |
| The image of Me                         | 88.000 | -1.942* |
| Fortune                                 | 68.500 | -2.551* |
| Control                                 | 77.000 | -2.292* |
| Problems solving                        | 77.500 | -2.271* |
| Search for social support               | 129.50 | -2.644* |
| Avoiding problems                       | 76.500 | -2.301* |

U = Value of criteria of Manna-Whitney; Z = Value of critical number; \* = statistically significant differences at  $p < 0.001$

- Life-threatening event as an opportunity to become themselves: deep study of themselves, their nature, their own uniqueness and as a consequence of such a revaluation-transition to authentic existence, congruence

To review the assumptions about differences in basic beliefs, life meaning orientation the subjective perception of time and coping strategies among men, participants of the accident, comparative analysis of two groups of men, participants of RTA was carried out (Table 2): Group 1 (42 of men) "effective experience of traffic accident" (EE of RTA) and group "ineffective experience of traffic accident" (IE of RTA). Men with revealed assertion of time "time does not exist" were included in group "IE of RTA"; negative attitude to time, the lack of connection of themselves with the present and any future prospects are looking to the future with fear, despair or indifference. They noted the loss of the meaning of life as a result of an accident the basic beliefs associated with hostility, injustice and uncontrollability of the world, the negative image of "Me" and belief in their own bad luck. Drawings of projective techniques "Man-Man in the rain" among these respondents testified about existence of passive coping strategies-avoiding problems.

Received result suggests that examinees of 2nd group ("IE of RTA") as opposed to 1st group ("EE of RTA") have no clear goals in life. They are not satisfied with their life in the present and do not see clear prospects in the future. They do not consider themselves able to control the development of their lives' events and believed that most of them result from an event or an action of others.

It can be concerned with happened road traffic accident where it was appraised by them as an event that is impossible to resist and self-confident uncertainty of

Table 3: Results of psychognostic search of RTA participants in groups "EE of RTA" and "IE of RTA"

| Techniques                        | Group "effective experience of RTA"   | "Ineffective experience of RTA"  |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Questionnaire and interview       | Destruction of the sense of security: rise of responsibility. Positive change in the meaning of life, increase the value of their life and others; increasing trust and closeness to people of RTA-a positive experience. Belief in benevolence, justice, controllability of the world, his fortune; positive image of "Me"   | Destruction of the sense of security: lack of self-confidence and self-assurance, causeless anxiety, feeling that might happen something unpleasant. Loss of meaning of life, do not associate themselves with the present and don't see any prospect in the future a sense of alienation from the people, reducing credibility Belief in hostility, injustice, uncontrollability of the world, own bad luck; the negative image of "Me".                |
| "World Assumptions scale"         | Positive image of "Me", the belief in luck, benevolence, justice of the world, possibility to control of happening events   | The negative image of the "Me", the belief in own bad luck in hostility, injustice of the world impossibility to control what is going on  |
| "Life meaning orientations"       | The main meaning of their life sees as in the present fullness of life as in the future-building goals and perspectives. The past plays not less important role   | There is no clear goal in life. Dissatisfaction with the life in the present, there are no clear prospects for the future. Low meaningfulness of life  |
| "Indication of coping strategies" | Active coping strategy-"Solving problems"   | Passive coping strategy-"Avoiding problems"  |
| "Man-Man in the rain"             | Active ways of coping with a life threatening event based on the following criteria: improving of aesthetics of the image, increasing the size of the picture, position of picture relative to the center, male in the rain, the availability of protection means from the rain, the use of three or more colors when painting, nature of the rain-drizzle (weak drizzle) | Passive ways of coping with a life threatening event by criteria: degradation of aesthetics of the image, reducing the size of the picture, man in the rain is standing in profile, running away or sitting in a puddle; the picture is shifted from the center female in the rain, the man in the rain is younger than on the picture "Man" or child; use no more than two colors, lack of protection from the rain, negative images, heavy rain (rain) |
| «Draw the time»                   | Opinion of the time: "Time is the present, past and future"; "Time is movement"; "Time is life", positive attitude to the time  | Opinion of the time: "time does not exist", negative attitude to the time  |

examinees caused the subsequent fatalistic attitude towards their own life and the loss of meaning of life. Cognitions of the men of group "IE of RTA" are focused on unpredictability, uncontrollability, hostility of surrounding reality, negative image of themselves. It can be connected with the fact that experience of road accident was not assimilated that is had not been included in the existing cognitive schema due to its inherent inflexibility, non-admission. Qualitative analysis of projective techniques "Man-Man in the rain" suggests that the men of group "IE of RTA" focused on avoiding the reality of the life-threatening event, feel the own powerlessness; subjectively appraising accident as an event that was impossible to resist. It is noted the loss of internal "rod", female style of behavior when confronted with difficulties (passivity, the desire to escape from the independent decision to shift responsibility onto others). Effective cognitive evaluation of happened event supposedly determined the choice of active coping strategies. The use of passive strategy is caused by the failure of examinees to objectively appraise what happened.

Thus, the results of research of basic beliefs, life meaning orientations, subjective perception of time and coping strategies in groups "effective experience of RTA" and "ineffective experience of RTA" can be summarized as follows (Table 3).

## CONCLUSION

The effectiveness of basic beliefs, life meaning orientations, subjective perception of time as the personal components of traffic accident experience is linked with using active coping strategies with the ability to assimilate new experience associated with the accident to change the existing concept of the world to a relevant principle of reality.

Choice of active coping strategies of the examinees is linked to cognitive assessment of life-threatening events, according to which they can overcome them by their own or with the help of others as well as with the possibility to find the meaning in a life-threatening event with the ability to appreciate and benefit from past experience with positive image of "Me".

To identify among participants of road accident persons with ineffective experience of traffic accident and therefore in need of special attention of the psychologist, it is advisable to use the following criteria: loss the meaning of life by examinees their lack of goals and prospects for the future the emergence of feelings of alienation after the accident from the others, less confidence to them; opinion of the time "Time does not exist", "time has stopped", negative subjective perception of time fear, despair and indifference in the future; self-doubt and self-assurance, causeless alarm, feeling that something unpleasant might happen which appeared after accident; appearance after accident belief in the

impossibility to control events, injustice, malevolence of the surrounding world, bad luck, the negative image of the “Me”. The main psychological assistance to participants of road accidents are: searching for meaning of life, where an essential element is the “design of the future”; techniques aimed at alteration of personal meanings scope; taking responsibility for their own lives; research with basic beliefs; formation of tolerance for variability of life; use of the psycho-training methods aimed at positive perception of oneself as an individual and as a subject of activity in difficult situations as well as at reducing anxiety, fear, depression; exercises to restore self-esteem, self-confidence to promote active modes of coping behaviour training in self-control, personal development resources.

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