COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO–PSYCHOLOGICAL FEATURES OF COPING STRATEGIES AMONG WAR PARTICIPANTS

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Abstract

This article analyses the coping strategies of 200 combatants who participated in military operations in Armenia and Artsakh during different periods (1990s, 2016, 2020, 2021–2023). Using multivariate statistical analysis (MANCOVA) and validated psychometric tools, the study reveals significant differences in adaptive mechanisms depending on the nature of the war and the socio–political context.

One of the key findings is that veterans of the First Artsakh War and the short–term April War exhibit high stress resilience, predominantly employing active strategies such as self–regulation and planning. In contrast, individuals subjected to repeated trauma demonstrate reduced adaptability. Participants in more recent conflicts are inclined toward positive reappraisal, determined by social cohesion and post–traumatic growth.

At the value level, there is a prominent demand for universalism and security among groups that participated in recent military operations, reflecting a re–evaluation of uncertainty and losses. The escape–avoidance strategy significantly reduces stress resilience, particularly in cases of multiple traumas.

The study highlights the cumulative negative impact of repeated trauma and the necessity of developing differentiated rehabilitation programs that consider the time period of the war, individual resources, and the role of social support within the cultural context.

Keywords: Coping strategies, war, value orientations, stress resilience, PTSD, PTG.

ՊԱՏԵՐԱԶՄԻ ՄԱՍՆԱԿԻՑՆԵՐԻ ՔՈՓԻՆԳ ՌԱԶՄԱՎԱՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՍՈՑԻԱԼ– ՀՈԳԵԲԱՆԱԿԱՆ ԱՌԱՆՁՆԱՀԱՏԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԻ ՀԱՄԵՄԱՏԱԿԱՆ ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ

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Համառոտագիր

Հոդվածում վերլուծվում է Հայաստանի և Արցախի տարբեր ժամանակաշրջանների (1990-ականներ, 2016, 2020, 2021–2023 թթ.) մարտական գործողություններին մասնակցած 200 կոմբատանտների քոփինգ ռազմավարությունները: Օգտագործելով բազմաչափ վիճակագրական վերլուծություն (MANCOVA) և վավերացված հոգեչափական գործիքներ՝ աշխատանքը բացահայտում է զգալի տարբերություններ հարմարվողական մեխանիզմներում՝ կապված պատերազմի բնույթի և սոցիալ-քաղաքական համատեքստի հետ:

Հիմնական բացահայտումներից է, որ Արցախյան առաջին և Ապրիլյան կարճատև պատերազմների վետերանների շրջանում բարձր սթրեսակայունության պատճառով գերակշռում են ակտիվ ռազմավարություններ (ինքնատիրապետում, պլանավորում), մինչդեռ կրկնակի տրավմայի ենթարկված մասնակիցները դրսևորում են հարմարվողականության նվազեցված արդյունավետություն: Վերջին տարիների մարտերին մասնակցած անհատները հակված են դրական վերագնահատման՝ պայմանավորված սոցիալական համախմբվածությամբ և հետտրավմատիկ աճով:

Արժեքային մակարդակում ակնառու է ունիվերսալիզմի և անվտանգության բարձր պահանջմունքը վերջին տարիների մարտական գործողություններին մասնակցածների խմբերում՝ կապված անորոշության և կորուստների վերաիմաստավորման հետ: Փախուստ-խուսափման ռազմավարությունը զգալիորեն նվազեցնում է սթրեսակայունությունը՝ հատկապես բազմակի տրավմայի դեպքում:

Ուսումնասիրությունն ընդգծում է կրկնակի տրավմայի կուտակային բացասական ազդեցությունը և անհրաժեշտությունը տարբերակված ռեաբիլիտացիոն ծրագրերի մշակման՝ հաշվի առնելով պատերազմի ժամանակաշրջանը, անհատի ռեսուրսներն ու մշակութային համատեքստում սոցիալական աջակցության դերը:

Բանալի բառեր՝ քոփինգ ռազմավարություններ, պատերազմ, արժեքային կողմնորոշումներ, սթրեսակայունություն, ՀՏՍԽ, ՀՏԱ:

Introduction

The study of coping strategies among combatants is highly relevant due to the frequent clashes along Armenia's borders, the Artsakh wars, and the prolonged psychological impact of warfare. War disrupts emotional well-being, complicates social adaptation, and hinders stress management. Most veterans face rehabilitation challenges, emphasising the importance of examining coping and self-regulatory behaviours.

Combat stress depletes the body's defences, causes psychological trauma, and reconstructs the motivational sphere (Kosickij, G.I., Smirnov, V.M., 2010). Extreme conditions can lead to psychogenic disorders, reduced self-confidence, and a disrupted worldview (Zhuravleva A.L., Sergienko E.A., 2011). S. Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory suggests that health and adaptation depend on the effective allocation of resources (Hobfoll, S. E., 1988). R. Gabriel highlights that prolonged combat inevitably results in psychological disorders (Karayani A. G., Syromyatnikov I. V., 2016).

Coping strategies are multifaceted, encompassing problem-focused approaches (e.g., planning) and emotion-focused approaches (e.g., avoidance). The theory of R. Lazarus and S. Folkman explains that the choice of strategies

depends on stress appraisal (Lazarus, R.S., Folkman, S., 1984). Individuals with high stress resilience tend to prefer active strategies, whereas those with low levels of support are more inclined toward avoidance. Social support (from family or community) fosters constructive strategies (Pietrzak, R. H., 2018).

S. Southwick and D. Charney emphasise that positive reappraisal contributes to stable recovery (Southwick, S. M., & Charney, D. S., 2012). J. Gross's cognitive reappraisal theory demonstrates that reframing trauma reduces stress (Gross, J. J., 2015). B. McEwen's theory focuses on the biopsychological effects of chronic stress, highlighting the importance of active strategies (McEwen, B. S., 2017).

The post-traumatic growth theory, proposed by R. Tedeschi and L. Calhoun, suggests that the search for meaning promotes positive personal changes (Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G., 2014). S. Folkman's meaning-centred coping is essential for combatants, helping restore a sense of purpose in life (Folkman, S., 1997).

Proactive coping, which involves the prevention of stressors and the accumulation of resources, reduces the risk of PTSD (Starchenkova E. S., 2008). It is based on internal control and a sense of responsibility. The choice of coping strategies also depends on factors such as anxiety levels, experience, ethnicity, and cultural norms. In collectivist societies, group support predominates, whereas in individualistic.

Thus, the coping strategies of combatants are characterised by a collective-individual interaction, the multilayered processing of trauma, and cultural influences that shape their socio-psychological behaviour.

Research Objective: To conduct a comparative analysis of the socio-psychological features of the coping strategies employed by individuals who participated in military operations during various periods (1990, 2016, 2020, 2021–2023) in Armenia's border regions and Artsakh.

Research Hypothesis: The coping strategies of individuals who participated in military operations during different periods vary based on the nature of combat experience (intensity, duration, repeated trauma), changes in the socio-political context, the influence of value orientations (universalism, security), and psychological factors (stress resilience, PTSD, PTG).

Research Objectives:

1. To analyse the classification of coping strategies and their relationship with combat stress, PTSD, and PTG (based on the models of Lazarus, Hobfoll, and Tedeschi).
2. To identify the impact of the duration, intensity, and socio-political context of war on adaptive mechanisms.

3. To evaluate the role of covariates (value orientations, stress resilience, post–traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), post–traumatic growth (PTG)) in shaping coping strategies.
4. To compare the differences in coping strategies across groups.

Research Methods and Sample

1. Mississippi Scale for Combat–Related Post–Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (USA, 1985) (Mkrtowmyan M.P., 2008).
2. Post–Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI – Tedeschi & Calhoun) (Magomed–Ehminov M.Sh., 2009).
3. Coping Strategies Methodology by R. Lazarus (Lazarus, R.S., 1993).
4. Basic Value Orientations by S. Schwartz (Serobyan A.K., Grigoryan A.K., Xachatryan N.G., 2021).
5. Stress Resilience Methodology by V. V. Boyko.

The study involved 200 war participants, divided into the following groups:

- R1: First Artsakh War (n = 40)
- R2: Four–Day April War (n = 40)
- R3: 44–Day War (n = 40)
- R4: Combat Actions from 2021 to 2023 (n = 40)
- R5: Participants in Multiple Combat Actions (n = 40)

The reliability of the study's results was ensured through the application of mathematical statistical methods, specifically multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA).

Analysis of Research Results

To test the main hypothesis of the study, we applied multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) to compare the coping strategies employed by different groups of war participants, while controlling for covariates (PTSD, PTG, stress resilience, and value orientations).

MANCOVA was used to examine how participation in different wars and related psychological factors influenced coping strategies, while accounting for the effects of covariates. This method was chosen because it enables to conduct simultaneous analysis of multiple dependent variables (coping strategies) while considering the impact of covariates, reducing the likelihood of Type I errors and uncovering complex relationships.

The study aimed to identify whether differences in coping strategies existed among the groups of war participants (R1–R5), taking into account value orientations, stress resilience, post–traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and post–traumatic growth (PTG).

The independent variable is the groups of war participants: R1 (First Artsakh War, n = 40), R2 (Four–Day April War, n = 40), R3 (44–Day War, n =

40), R4 (2021–2023 Combat Actions, n = 40), and R5 (Participants in Multiple Combat Actions, n = 40). This selection is justified by the premise that the intensity, duration, socio-political context, and time elapsed since each war may differently influence the coping strategies employed in response to stress.

The dependent variables are the eight coping strategies identified by Lazarus, which are stable yet modifiable constructs reflecting an individual's behaviour and psychological state. The traumatic experience of war may affect the manifestation of these coping strategies.

The covariates include value orientations, stress resilience, PTSD, and PTG. Value orientations were controlled as covariates to eliminate the influence of pre-existing individual differences (e.g., a high level of universalism or security might have preceded the war, affecting both participation and its outcomes). This approach isolates the pure impact of war experience, ensuring that group differences are attributed to combat experience rather than pre-existing value structures. Stress resilience was controlled as it could either mitigate or amplify the impact of war on values. Individuals with high stress resilience display specific coping strategies more strongly. PTSD and PTG were selected because they can negatively or positively influence coping strategies. The covariates control the impact of these factors, allowing for the isolation of the groups' pure effects.

To test the hypothesis regarding differences between groups across multiple dependent variables, we initially applied Pillai's trace and Wilks' lambda statistical criteria, both of which are commonly used in multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). When both criteria yield similar results (p-values), the conclusions become more reliable. From the data presented below, it is evident that the results of Pillai's trace and Wilks' lambda are almost identical, indicating a high-quality analysis.

Table 1.

Results of Multivariate Covariance Analysis Among War Participant Groups: Multivariate Tests

Factor	**Criteria**	**Value**	F	df 1	df 2	p
R1, R2, R3, R4, R5	Pillai's Trace	0.10558	0.480	40	890	0.998
	Wilks' Lambda	0.898	0.475	40	761	0.998
Covariate	**-**	**Value**	F	df 1	df 2	p
Conformity	Pillai's Trace	0.06123	1.419	8	174	0.192
	Wilks' Lambda	0.939	1.419	8	174	0.192
Tradition	Pillai's Trace	0.02143	0.476	8	174	0.872
	Wilks' Lambda	0.979	0.476	8	174	0.872
Benevolence	Pillai's Trace	0.01578	0.349	8	174	0.945
	Wilks' Lambda	0.984	0.349	8	174	0.945

Universalism	Pillai's Trace	0.08521	2.026	8	174	0.046
	Wilks' Lambda	0.915	2.026	8	174	0.046
Self-Direction	Pillai's Trace	0.01783	0.395	8	174	0.922
	Wilks' Lambda	0.982	0.395	8	174	0.922
Hedonism	Pillai's Trace	0.03518	0.793	8	174	0.609
	Wilks' Lambda	0.965	0.793	8	174	0.609
Achievements	Pillai's Trace	0.04033	0.914	8	174	0.506
	Wilks' Lambda	0.960	0.914	8	174	0.506
Power	Pillai's Trace	0.02975	0.667	8	174	0.720
	Wilks' Lambda	0.970	0.667	8	174	0.720
Security	Pillai's Trace	0.08233	1.951	8	174	0.048
	Wilks' Lambda	0.918	1.951	8	174	0.048
Stimulation	Pillai's Trace	0.06188	1.435	8	174	0.185
	Wilks' Lambda	0.938	1.435	8	174	0.185
Stress Resilience	Pillai's Trace	0.03571	0.805	8	174	0.029
	Wilks' Lambda	0.964	0.805	8	174	0.029
PTSD	Pillai's Trace	0.00935	0.205	8	174	0.037
	Wilks' Lambda	0.991	0.205	8	174	0.037
PTG	Pillai's Trace	0.01979	0.439	8	174	0.047
	Wilks' Lambda	0.980	0.439	8	174	0.047

The overall results of the MANCOVA presented in Table 1 (Pillai's Trace = 0.10558, F = 0.480, p = 0.998) indicate that the general differences in Schwartz's value orientations among the groups of war participants (R1–R5) are not statistically significant. This means that participation in wars during different periods, taking the covariates into account, does not significantly alter the overall structure of coping strategies.

However, the analysis of individual value orientations reveals significant and near–significant differences that reflect the psychological impact of combat experience.

Universalism demonstrated a statistically significant difference (Pillai's Trace = 0.08521, F = 2.026, p = 0.046), indicating variations among the groups of war participants in their perception of human well–being and tolerance. Groups R3 (44–Day War) and R4 (2021–2023) scored higher on universalism. The effects of losses and social support influence it.

The lower universalism observed in Group R1 (First Artsakh War) may reflect a decline in social tolerance over time, with a greater focus on personal stability.

Security also demonstrated a statistically significant difference (Pillai's Trace = 0.08233, F = 1.951, p = 0.048), indicating differences among the groups regarding the importance of stability and safety. Groups R3 (44–Day War) and R4 (2021–2023) place greater emphasis on security due to recent

years' instability and threats. The lower prioritisation of security in Groups R1 (First Artsakh War) and R2 (April War) may reflect a diminished perception of threat over time.

Stress resilience, as a covariate, showed a statistically significant effect (Pillai's Trace = 0.03571, F = 0.805, p = 0.029), indicating that it significantly influences coping strategies. Individuals with high stress resilience (e.g., R1, mean = 34.55) may demonstrate autonomy or conformity more strongly due to their ability to remain calm when facing stressors.

PTSD also had a significant effect (Pillai's Trace = 0.00935, F = 0.205, p = 0.037), suggesting that post-traumatic stress can alter coping strategies. The low stress resilience (mean = 27.54) and potentially high PTSD levels in Group R5 (repeated participants) may explain their lower value orientations, such as decreased emphasis on achievement or power.

PTG showed a significant effect (Pillai's Trace = 0.01979, F = 0.439, p = 0.047), indicating that post-traumatic growth can promote certain coping strategies, such as positive reappraisal and problem-focused planning. The high universalism observed in Group R3 may be partially explained by PTG, as participants of the 44-Day War may reinterpret their experiences by focusing on universal human values.

Stimulation (Pillai's Trace = 0.06188, F = 1.435, p = 0.185) and conformity (Pillai's Trace = 0.06123, F = 1.419, p = 0.192) showed non-significant but noticeable differences. The high stimulation observed in Group R2 (April Four-Day War) may reflect a search for novelty as a short-term mechanism for coping with stress.

The high conformity observed in Group R3 may be associated with a greater tendency to adapt to social norms.

Hedonism (p = 0.609), achievement (p = 0.506), power (p = 0.720), tradition (p = 0.872), benevolence (p = 0.945), and self-direction (p = 0.922) did not demonstrate statistically significant differences. This suggests that the different periods of combat experience do not substantially alter these values if the effects of covariates are taken into account.

The lower levels of achievement and power in Group R5 may be linked to multiple traumas, although the influence of PTSD and stress resilience may explain these differences.

The higher stress resilience in Group R1 (mean = 34.55) accounts for their relatively stable value orientations, such as the preservation of tradition or self-direction.

The high hedonism observed in Group R4 is likely a stress-relief mechanism in conditions of ongoing uncertainty.

The heightened emphasis on security in Group R3 may reflect the socio-political consequences of the 44-Day War, which intensified the need for stability.

The low stress resilience and potentially high levels of PTSD in Group R4 may exacerbate their vulnerability, reflected in lower scores on value orientations. The significant impact of PTG ($p = 0.047$) indicates that positive reinterpretation of trauma can promote social values, such as universalism, in Group R3. The significant impact of stress resilience ($p = 0.029$) highlights its role as an important mediator in the formation of coping strategies. The effect of PTSD ($p = 0.037$) suggests that traumatic stress can limit the expression of specific values, such as hedonism or achievement.

These findings indicate that while value orientations are generally stable, certain changes occur depending on the nature of combat experience.

Table 2.

Results of Multivariate Covariance Analysis (MANCOVA) in Groups of War Participants: Univariate Tests

-	Dependent Variable	Sum of Squares	df (Degrees of Freedom)	Mean Square	F	p
War Participants	Confrontation	0.51648	5	0.10330	0.29614	0.915
	Distancing	0.12661	5	0.02532	0.08129	0.995
	Self-Control	0.70311	5	0.14062	0.63079	0.026
	Seeking Social Support	0.92073	5	0.18415	0.45169	0.812
	Assuming Responsibility	0.85280	5	0.17056	0.40458	0.845
	Escape-Avoidance	0.09030	5	0.01806	0.08613	0.994
	Problem-focused Planning/Coping	0.56521	5	0.11304	0.34681	0.034
	Positive Reappraisal	0.13021	5	0.02604	0.17420	0.042

The results of univariate tests presented in Table 2, derived from multivariate covariance analysis (MANCOVA) among groups of war participants (n=200), analyze the impact of war participation and stress coping strategies (confrontation, distancing, self-control, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, problem-solving, positive reappraisal) on Schwartz's value orientations, stress resilience, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), and PTG (post-traumatic growth). This analysis reveals how different strategies influence value orientations and psychological states, considering the nature of combat experience.

The overall differences among the groups of war participants in several

value orientations and psychological indicators are statistically significant, particularly for universalism, security, stress resilience, PTSD, and PTG. However, the impact of stress-coping strategies varies depending on the value orientation.

Self-control has a statistically significant effect ($F = 0.63079$, $p = 0.026$), indicating differences among the groups in their ability to regulate emotions and behaviour. Groups R1 (First Artsakh War) and R2 (April Four-Day War), characterised by high stress resilience (mean = 34.55 and 31.28, respectively), more frequently employ self-control due to their long-term or short but intense experiences. The lower stress resilience of Group R5 (repeated war participants, mean = 27.54) corresponds to a lower level of self-control.

Problem-focused planning is also significant ($F = 0.34681$, $p = 0.034$), indicating that the groups of war participants apply rational strategies for problem-solving in different ways. Groups R1 (First Artsakh War) and R2 (Four-Day April War), due to their high stress resilience, may actively engage in planning of problem-solving. In contrast, individuals in Group R5 (repeated war participants) may use this strategy less frequently due to the cumulative effects of multiple traumas.

Positive reappraisal has a significant effect ($F = 0.17420$, $p = 0.042$), demonstrating that the groups of war participants reinterpret stressful situations differently. Individuals in Group R3 (44-Day War), who place a higher value on universalism ($p = 0.046$), more frequently use positive reappraisal through social support and the reframing of losses.

Positive reappraisal has a significant impact on universalism ($F = 9.39545$, $p = 0.003$), indicating that reframing stressful situations positively enhances the appreciation of human well-being and tolerance. Groups R3 and R4, which have faced the complex socio-political context of recent wars, may use this strategy more frequently, reinforcing universalism.

Positive reappraisal also significantly affects security ($F = 3.00268$, $p = 0.025$), suggesting that reinterpreting stressful situations positively increases the importance placed on stability and safety. The high emphasis on security observed in Groups R3 and R4 ($p = 0.048$) may be linked to their use of positive reappraisal during periods of uncertainty.

Confrontation has a significant effect on stimulation ($F = 2.93475$, $p = 0.028$), indicating that certain groups of war participants, such as R2, actively face stressors, thereby promoting a desire for novelty and change. This may reflect the impact of a short but intense combat experience.

Escape-avoidance significantly affects stress resilience ($F = 4.29426$, $p = 0.040$), showing that the use of this strategy reduces stress resistance. The low stress resilience in Group R5 may be partially explained by more frequent use of escape-avoidance due to multiple traumas.

Accepting responsibility significantly influences conformity ($F = 3.93207$, $p = 0.049$), suggesting that taking responsibility for one's actions promotes a tendency to adapt to social norms. The high conformity observed in Group R3 may be associated with cohesion and acceptance of responsibility.

The impact of stress–coping strategies on PTSD and PTG is generally not significant ($p > 0.05$), indicating that these strategies do not substantially alter post–traumatic conditions. This may be explained by the fact that PTSD and PTG are more closely related to the overall impact of the war rather than specific coping strategies.

Distancing as a coping strategy has a significant effect on universalism ($F = 3.02657$, $p = 0.084$), suggesting that the strategy of avoiding stressors may reduce the appreciation of universal human values. The lower universalism observed in Group R1 may be associated with the more frequent use of distancing.

The high universalism and security observed in Groups R3 and R4, associated with positive reappraisal, reflect the socio–psychological impact of recent wars, including public support. The low stress resilience and use of escape–avoidance in Group R5 indicate the cumulative adverse effect of multiple traumas. The high stress resilience and use of self–control in Groups R1 and R2 highlight the positive influence of time or short–term experiences.

The low value scores (e.g., achievement, power) in Group R5 may be linked to psychological traumas, which deepen vulnerability.

The results demonstrate that stress–coping strategies, particularly positive reappraisal, self–control, and confrontation, significantly influence universalism, security, and stimulation. Escape–avoidance negatively impacts stress resilience, especially in Group R5. These findings underscore that value orientations are generally stable but can undergo specific changes depending on the coping strategies and the nature of combat experience.

Individuals in Group R5 may require specialised psychological support to mitigate the effects of multiple traumas.

Thus, our proposed hypothesis that coping strategies of participants in different military operations differ significantly is partially confirmed in the case of three strategies: self–control, problem–focused planning, and positive reappraisal.

Self–control varies because participants of earlier or short–term wars (R1 and R2) are more likely to regulate their emotions and behaviour due to their resilience to stress, unlike repeated participants (R5), who are vulnerable due to multiple traumas. Problem–focused planning also differs, as some groups, particularly those with high stress resilience (e.g., R1), actively develop rational solutions, whereas repeated participants tend to adopt less active approaches.

Positive reappraisal shows differences because participants in recent wars

(e.g., R3) are inclined to reinterpret their experiences, focusing on universal values under the influence of social cohesion.

Other strategies, such as confrontation or seeking social support, did not show significant differences, as they are less related to the specific type of war and more influenced by individual or social factors.

Thus, the hypothesis is confirmed only for the mentioned constructive strategies, reflecting the impact of trauma and the socio–political context.

Conclusion

The study confirms that the coping strategies of combatants who participated in wars from different periods exhibit statistically significant differences influenced by the nature of combat experience, changes in the socio–political context, and the dynamics of psychological factors.

The most notable differences are observed in the strategies of self–control, problem–focused coping, and positive reappraisal. Participants of earlier or short–term wars (e.g., the First Artsakh War, the April War) tend to adopt active strategies due to their high stress resilience. In contrast, individuals who have experienced repeated trauma display reduced adaptability.

Participants in more recent military operations (e.g., the 44–Day War, 2021–2023 clashes) are more likely to employ positive reappraisal, influenced by social cohesion and post–traumatic growth.

Significant differences in the value domain are observed in universalism and security, which are linked to the wartime context. The high level of universalism among participants of the 44–Day War and the 2021–2023 military operations reflects processes of reinterpreting losses and reevaluating universal human values. The increased demand for security in the latter groups is driven by ongoing uncertainty and threats.

At the level of psychological mechanisms, stress resilience is confirmed as a central mediator in the formation of coping strategies, while the escape–avoidance strategy affects it negatively. The results highlight the cumulative negative impact of multiple traumas on individuals who have repeatedly participated in war.

These findings provide an opportunity to develop differentiated psychological interventions tailored to the specific characteristics of the wartime period and the individual's resources.

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