

Individual coping strategies and forms of aggressive behavior in persons with terrorist background

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Abstract. The paper presents the experimental study of the characteristics of coping strategies and aggressive behavior in persons involved in terrorist crimes. The survey involved 32 people detained by law enforcement agencies of the Chechen Republic and undergoing a comprehensive forensic psychological and psychiatric examination on the basis of the State Budgetary Institution “Republican Psychoneurological Dispensary” of the Ministry of Health of the Chechen Republic, which was a part of investigative actions. As a result, it was found that, the most preferable coping mechanisms in the current situation (under investigation) for the studied group of people were seeking social support and responsibility admission. At the same time, the used coping strategies were combined with a low level of suicidal risk and an increase in the level of frustration, rigidity, and anxiety.

1 Introduction

Terrorism is a key problem of global importance in the modern world because it does not have a specific territorial localization and targeting in its manifestation. The devastating consequences of terrorism are expressed not only in colossal human casualties, material and psychological losses, but also in the depreciation of basic universal human values and the familiar worldview, which made the world a safer, more understandable and predictable place for human existence [1].

Terrorism is construed by many modern researchers as an international problem. They consider one of the significant phenomena of terrorism to be its ability to survive: flexibility, mobility, the ability to suddenly manifest itself in different regions of the planet [2]. At the same time, regardless of the region and the socio-political slogans and views declared by supporters of terrorist organizations, the extreme aggressiveness of terrorism is its main element.

Aggression and violence of the members of terrorist organizations or their supporters are based on high personal aggressiveness, which accumulates in the relevant communities affiliated with terrorists (under the influence of certain ideas and suggestions) and functions as one of the triggers for socially dangerous behavior of direct terrorism actors.

According to S.N. Enikolopov, terrorism is one of the forms of aggressive behavior expressed in the deliberate infliction of harm, leading to basic human needs infringement (including the basic need for life). The act of terrorism itself being a kind of instrumental aggression, aims to express protest on the part of the object (person, group) in relation to certain social norms.

Despite the fact that the results of the terrorists' actions are damage to property, infringement of human rights and needs, as well as the threat or deprivation of a person's life, the specificity of this phenomenon is determined by the leading motivations of terrorists being intolerance, rejection and struggle against the norms and values imposed by a certain society [3].

Based on the above, it seems practically significant for science to study the specifics of the aggressive personal reactions and socio-psychological strategies of stress-coping behavior in the psychological profile of direct terrorists.

To the question of aggression and aggressiveness. In the literature, aggression (from Latin *aggreder* – to attack) considers various forms of individual or group behavior based on aggressiveness and aimed to cause psychological, physical or other damage to people or other objects of the surrounding world. Consequently, aggression and aggressiveness are closely interrelated phenomena of a single destructive behavior, where the first is a specific process of organization, and the second is part of a more complex structure of mental properties, a personality trait [4–6]. Thus, aggressive behavior is an attempt to perform a destructive action, which gives vent to personal aggressive feelings, helps raise self-esteem (L. Bender) and resistance to external forces (F. Allan) by inflicting material or moral damage to the corresponding objects of aggressive behavior [7, 8].

According to the opinion of established scientists (G. Tarde, E. Durkheim) [9, 10], the social disorganization of an individual, unacceptability of generally accepted values is a key to propensities for crime and aggressiveness [4]. Moreover, aggressive behavior (as well as its degree of severity and nature)

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can also be the result of an individual's assimilation of social experience within their social learning [11, 12].

In this regard, aggressiveness being a socio-psychological phenomenon is interconnected with various psychological parameters of an individual, specifically, unhealthy egocentrism, emotional instability, impulsiveness, pathological anxiety, inadequate self-esteem, problems of socialization, etc. [12–14].

According to S. Ivanov, aggressiveness is expressed in the relatively constant readiness of an individual for violent behaviors in various everyday situations of interaction with others, the desire to be seen strong by others and gain recognition and authority. At the same time, aggressiveness can act as a protective mechanism of the personality, as a way to get rid of the sense of upcoming danger [15].

To the question of coping behavior. Coping behavior styles are understood as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral ways of overcoming specific external and internal requirements assessed by a person as significant or exceeding his capabilities [16, 17].

According to T.L. Kryukova, coping behavior is purposeful behavior and allows a person to cope with life's difficulties and extreme situations through the use of conscious behavioral strategies that either adapt an actor to the requirements of the situation or help transform it [18].

In many studies, the problem of coping behavior is considered in the context of an individual's experience concerning intense stress reactions. Studies show that the choice of certain coping mechanisms (task-oriented style) and the rejection of others (emotional coping) helps an individual to successfully overcome the consequences of extreme situations [19].

At the same time, it has long been established that the applied coping mechanisms are interconnected with the individual psychological characteristics (dispositions) of the traumatized individual including aggressiveness [20, 21].

The purpose of the study is to research coping behavior styles and psycho-emotional phenomena of the prerequisites for aggressive behavior (anxiety, aggressive-suicidal reactions), as well as their mutual consistency among the contingent of persons involved in terrorist crimes.

2 Materials and Methods

Table 2. Levels of coping strategies severity among surveyed terrorists (n = 25).

Severity levels	Seeking Social Support		Confrontational coping		Distancing		Self control	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Absence	5	20	13	52	2	8	10	40
Low level	9	36	12	48	19	76	7	28
Middle level	9	36	0	0	4	16	5	20
High level	2	8	0	0	0	0	3	12
Chi-square and p-significance	$\chi^2=5.560$ p=0.135		$\chi^2=0.040$ p=0.841		$\chi^2=20.720$ p=0.000		$\chi^2=4.280$ p=0.233	

At the same time, the absolute majority of the surveyed (52 %) did not manifest the confrontational

The study involved 32 people aged 19 to 45 who were detained by law enforcement agencies and special services of the Russian Federation on the territory of the Chechen Republic for participating in illegal armed groups, preparing and committing high-profile terrorist crimes.

Research methods: Eysenck's self-assessment of mental states, suicide risk questionnaire (modified by T.N. Razuvaeva), Lazarus Coping test, E.P. Ilyin's auto- and hetero-aggression questionnaire.

3 Results and Discussion

As a result of the experimental study, we obtained the following outcomes.

Table 1. Mean values of coping strategies severity among individuals with terrorist background.

Variables	Average rank	Assigned rank
Confrontational coping	3.14	8
Distancing	4.97	3
Self control	4.30	6
Seeking Social Support	5.63	1
Responsibility admission	5.50	2
Escape-avoidance	3.58	7
Problem resolution planning	4.09	5
Positive revaluation	4.80	4

Note: $\chi^2 = 41.308$; $p = 0.000$

A comparative analysis of terrorists' coping strategies showed that the most pronounced coping strategies and, accordingly, the ones the most frequently used by terrorists were such strategies as seeking social support, accepting responsibility, and distancing. At the same time, such forms of coping as confrontational coping, escape-avoidance, and self-control turned out to be less popular among terrorists ($\chi^2=41.308$; $p=0.000$).

According to the frequency analysis of the prevalence of coping behavior strategies among persons who committed terrorist crimes, it was found that seeking social support was at a low level of severity in 36 % of the surveyed, while the same number in the total sample had an average level of severity, then only 8 % of the total number of those surveyed had a high level of this coping mechanism (20 %, on the contrary, demonstrated lack of the mechanisms aimed to seek social support).

coping mechanism at all, while 48 % demonstrated low levels of this mechanism. A low level of distancing was

found in the absolute majority of respondents, specifically, 76 % of the total sample, while the absence of this strategy or its average level of severity was demonstrated by 8 % and 16 % of the surveyed, respectively. According to the coping strategy

implemented through self-control, 28, 20 and 12 % of the surveyed, respectively, had low, medium and high levels, while the vast majority (40 %) demonstrated lack of this strategy.

Table 2.1. Levels of coping strategies severity among surveyed terrorists (n = 25).

Severity levels	Responsibility admission		Escape-avoidance		Problem resolution planning		Positive revaluation	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Absence	8	32	12	48	12	48	10	40
Low level	8	32	10	40	5	20	4	16
Middle level	6	24	3	12	5	20	6	24
High level	3	12	0	0	3	12	5	20
Chi-square and p-significance	$\chi^2 = 2.680$ p = 0.444		$\chi^2 = 5.360$ p = 0.069		$\chi^2 = 7.480$ p = 0.058		$\chi^2 = 3.320$ p = 0.345	

As can be seen from Table 2.1, more than half of the surveyed (64 % of respondents) either completely lacked (32 %) or had a low level (32 %) of responsibility admission. While the average level for this coping strategy was observed in 24 % of respondents and only 12 % had high rates. Escape-avoidance was at a low level of severity in 40 % of the respondents (48 % demonstrated a complete lack of this coping mechanism) and on average in 12 % of respondents. The next coping strategy, problem resolution planning, was also absent in the structure of adaptive behavioral mechanisms in 48 %, while low, medium and high levels of this mechanism were demonstrated by 20 %, 20 % and 12 % of the surveyed, respectively. And, finally, the severity of the coping strategy focused on positive revaluation in a stressful situation was low in 16 %, medium in 24 %, and high in 20 %. At the same time, the majority of respondents from the sample of terrorists (40 %) lacked this mechanism in the structure of adaptive and coping behavior.

At the same time, a comparative analysis of the parameters of auto-hetero aggression severity showed a

significant predominance among the sample of terrorists of the aggression directed at themselves (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparative analysis of auto and hetero aggression severity among terrorists

Paired sample statistics		Average	N	Standard deviation	Standard mean error
Pair 1	Autoaggression scale	4.41***	32	1.794	0.317
	Heteroaggression scale	2.63***	32	2.152	0.380

Note: *** p≤0.000

According to the analysis of average values, auto-aggressive behavior was more preferable for the surveyed terrorists than hetero-aggression. The indicators on the autoaggression scale turned out to be significantly pronounced in comparison with similar indicators on the heteroaggression scale.

At the same time, states of anxiety predominated in the mental activity of persons with a terrorist background.

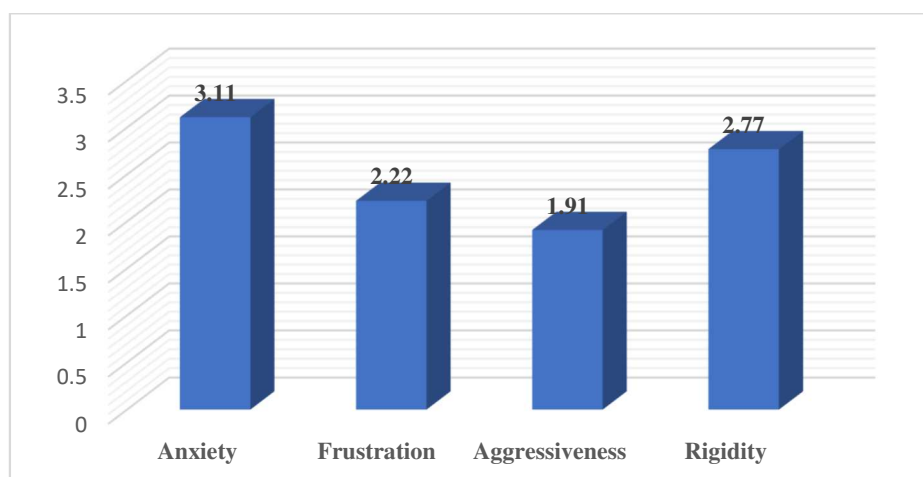


Figure 1. Comparative analysis of terrorists' emotional states severity (Note: $\chi^2 = 21.906$; p = 0.000).

According to the comparative analysis of 4 scales severity according to the Eysenck method, anxiety was the most pronounced emotional reaction of terrorists,

while rigidity, frustration and aggressiveness were respectively less pronounced ($\chi^2 = 21.906$; p = 0.000).

In addition to emotional states and forms of auto-hetero aggression, the study also analyzed subscales

characterizing suicidal intentions and suicidal risk factors among the surveyed sample of persons involved in terrorist crimes (Table 4).

This identified the most predominant factors of suicidal risk among those surveyed. Thus, out of 9 subscales (according to T.N. Razuvaeva's suicidal risk questionnaire), the parameters of the anti-suicidal factor as well as the subscales of insolvency and social pessimism (the first three factors with high average values) turned out to be the most predominant, while lower average values were found on demonstrativeness, maximalism and time perspective ($\chi^2=59.865$; $p=0.000$).

Further, in accordance with the study objective, the correlations of the terrorists' coping strategies with their emotional states and aggressive-suicidal reactions were analyzed (see Table 5).

Table 4. Comparative analysis of terrorists' suicidal reactions severity.

Variables	Average rank	Assigned rank
Demonstrativeness	3.98	8
Affectivity	4.41	5
Uniqueness	3.61	9
Insolvency	6.48	2
Social pessimism	6.39	3
Cultural barriers destruction	4.69	4
Maximalism	4.16	7
Time perspective	4.28	6
Anti-suicidal factor	7.00	1

Note: $\chi^2=59.865$; $p=0.000$

Table 5. Analysis of contingency of coping strategies and emotional reactions of persons involved in terrorist crimes.

Variables	Spearman Rank Order Correlations							
	MD pairwise deleted							
	Marked correlations are significant at $p < .05000$							
	Confrontational coping	Distancing	Self control	Seeking Social Support	Responsibility admission	Escape-avoidance	Problem resolution planning	Positive revaluation
Anti-suicidal factor	0.358	0.391	0.470	0.480	0.541	0.428	0.448	0.463
Anxiety	0.406	0.236	0.296	0.389	0.358	0.478	0.349	0.354
Frustration	0.343	0.406	0.356	0.446	0.414	0.495	0.439	0.445
Rigidity	0.423	0.356	0.402	0.532	0.427	0.487	0.401	0.407

As a result of the analysis, no significant correlations were found between coping mechanisms and such research variables as demonstrativeness, affectivity, uniqueness, insolvency, social pessimism, cultural barriers destruction, maximalism, time perspective, auto-aggression scale, hetero-aggression scale and aggressiveness. At the same time, it was reliably established that the anti-suicidal factor had positive connections with several coping strategies simultaneously. Specifically, these strategies are as follows: self-control ($r=0.470$; $p<0.05$), seeking social support ($r=0.480$; $p<0.05$), responsibility admission ($r=0.541$; $p<0.05$), escape-avoidance ($r=0.428$; $p<0.05$), problem resolution planning ($r=0.448$; $p<0.05$) and positive revaluation ($r=0.463$; $p<0.05$). Frustration as an emotional reaction was also positively associated with these coping styles: seeking social support ($r=0.446$; $p<0.05$), responsibility admission ($r=0.414$; $p<0.05$), escape-avoidance ($r=0.495$; $p<0.05$), problem resolution planning ($r=0.439$; $p<0.05$) and positive revaluation ($r=0.445$; $p<0.05$). Anxiety was one of the emotional states positively correlating only with the coping strategy implemented through escape-avoidance ($r=0.478$; $p<0.05$). Rigidity, on the one hand, positively correlated with the same coping strategies: seeking social support ($r=0.532$; $p<0.05$), responsibility admission ($r=0.427$; $p<0.05$) and escape-avoidance ($r=0.487$; $p<0.05$), and, on the other hand, it was positively consistent with the confrontational style of coping behavior ($r=0.423$; $p<0.05$).

According to the analysis, the specific category of people examined as part of the experiment was generally characterized by the predominance of coping styles in the structure of adaptive mechanisms focused on seeking social support and responsibility admission, which can be considered an adequate response of the cognitive-behavioral and emotional sphere in the current situation. In Chechen Republic persons accused of terrorism on the territory of the are often deprived of social support and sympathy from not only relatives, but from the whole society, therefore, the search for support and understanding from others can become one of the most important mechanisms for overcoming intense stressful experiences. At the same time, understanding the inevitability of punishment and the need to answer to the fullest extent of the law for committed crimes may contribute to the development of another coping strategy being responsibility admission. At the same time, attempts to overcome intense stressful experiences associated with various risks, both during the commission of socially dangerous criminal acts by the examined terrorists, and with subsequent detention and serious accusation, can determine the development of anxious experiences, the source of which is outside (the whole world around) and accordingly, the development of a response to external challenges in the form of aggression (heteroaggression).

It should also be noted that the so-called anti-suicidal factor turned out to be the leading one among the detained terrorists. This indicates that the criminals, even being subjected to high anxiety, aggressiveness and suicidal risk factors, understood that the act of suicide was sinful and were not ready to inflict pain and physical

4 Results and Discussion

suffering on themselves. In this regard, it is possible to claim, on the one hand, the high efficiency of the security services and law enforcement agencies that successfully detained criminals who, apparently, did not have time to become blind religious fanatics, ready to detonate themselves with “bombs”, and, on the other hand, the productivity of preventive work institutions of power and society, constantly promoting the priority of life over death for a believer, by informational, religious and spiritual influence.

5 Conclusion

The aggressive impulses of the surveyed terrorists are largely directed outside, which is manifested by the predominance of heteroaggression against the background of high anxiety.

Among the styles of coping behavior for terrorists, coping mechanisms aimed at seeking social support and responsibility admission are more preferable, while low values are noted for the parameters of confrontational coping and problem escaping coping.

The styles of coping used by terrorists, on the one hand, are associated with development of anxiety states, frustration, and rigidity, on the other hand, with the formation of an anti-suicidal personality factor.

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