

## Relationship between prisoners' self-awareness and stress problems related to psychological well-being and duration in prison

Sewagegn Mola Melaku <sup>a\*</sup>, Wachemo University, Department of psychology, Hosanna, Ethiopia.

Tigist Shiferaw Hunde <sup>b</sup>, Wachemo University, Department of psychology, Hosanna, Ethiopia.

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### Abstract

Various studies have focused on prisoners' self-awareness, stress and stress-coping problems, concerning their psychological and social well-being; however, they did not show detailed information about the differences in these variables concerning prisoners in Addis Ababa. This study aimed to address the relationship between components of psychological well-being and duration among prisoners in Addis Ababa's Kality Correctional Centre. To meet this objective, the researcher selected 100 participants by using systematic random sampling techniques. A 5-point Likert-type scale questionnaire was used. The data were analysed through percentage, frequency and correlation. The result revealed that there is no significant relationship between components of psychological well-being and age among prisoners. However, the study revealed that there is a significant difference between male and female prisoners in the components of psychological well-being.

Keywords: Prisoners, self-awareness, stress, psychological well-being;

\*ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Sewagegn Mola Melaku, Wachemo University, Department of psychology, Hosanna, Ethiopia.

E-mail address: [sewahabesha@gmail.com](mailto:sewahabesha@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

Human beings are sociable creatures and have developed many ways to communicate messages, thoughts and feelings with one another. Not all psychological and psychiatric problems and disorders are significantly more prevalent in prisons. Mood disorders (i.e., disorders in the affective spectrum including depression, melancholy and adjustment disorder) are generally found with a comparable or a little higher frequency in prison studies than in the general population (Smith et al., 2011). However, there are differences in studies and several studies indicate a high prevalence of major depression among prisoners (Fazel & Danesh, 2002). Many research findings depict that people with low self-awareness are uncertain and confused about themselves. So, they are oriented towards avoiding risk and potential loss and are shy, modest and emotionally labelled (and have tendencies towards depression and anxiety) (Latifoglu, Uzunboyly, & Kagan, 2017; Páez Gallego, De-Juanas Oliva, García Castilla, & Díaz Santiago, 2020; Roy, 1993).

Empirically, some investigators have sought to find their inner core of self-doubt and reported that they could not do so about some components (i.e., self-awareness, stress and stress coping) of psychological well-being. Delorme et al. (2011) suggest that members of violent gangs do not carry around a load of inner insecurities (like stress and stress coping, low self-awareness and social anxiety).

Psychological well-being problems of prisoners, like self-awareness, stress and stress coping, are the variables of interest (Tavoosy & Jelveh, 2019). Self-awareness involves the conscious awareness of one's thoughts, behaviour, feelings and traits (Au & Kennedy, 2018; Cumhuri & Tezer, 2019). People who lack self-awareness and people who have no idea what is the value of knowing oneself for the sake of their future appear to be at risk of experiencing several psychological and social problems. Some evidence suggests that deficits in self-awareness are related to drug abuse, criminal activity and delinquency (Clayton & Opatow, 2003; Durmuscelebi & Kusucuran, 2018; Tukaiev et al., 2019).

Mikalauskiene and Laurinavičius (2019), in a longitudinal study in a Canadian correctional centre, show that no reliable relationship exists between the length of imprisonment and the psychological well-being of prisoners. On the other hand, self-awareness has frequently been viewed as an important target of intervention with criminal populations (David, Bissonette, & Hargis, 1998). Many programme designers have assumed that self-awareness is an important outcome and that a side benefit of their offender programming efforts is an increase in this highly desirable personal state (Shen et al., 2013). Also, an interesting research project conducted by Bates et al. (2020) illustrates that the perceptions of many correctional programme designers, regarding offenders' self-awareness, have a crucial role in maintaining the personal states of the prisoners.

### 1.1. Purpose of the study

Even though the abovementioned studies focused on prisoners' self-awareness, stress and stress coping problems, concerning prisoners' psychological and social well-being, they did not show detailed information about the differences in self-awareness, stress and stress coping concerning gender (some components of psychological well-being) among prisoners in Addis Ababa. However, unlike the abovementioned research, the present study aimed at studying the relationship between

some components of psychological well-being (i.e., self-awareness, stress and stress-coping mechanisms) among prisoners of Addis Ababa's correction centre. Therefore, assessing the relationship between prisons' psychological well-being and duration in prison, in Addis Ababa's Kality Correctional Centre, was guided by the following basic research questions:

- What is the relationship between the years of stay in prison and the levels of self-awareness, stress and stress coping among prisoners?
- Is there a gender difference in self-awareness, stress and stress coping among prisoners?
- Is there a relationship between a prisoner's psychological well-being and their age?

The purpose of the study is to assess the relationship between prisoners' psychological well-being and duration in prison in Addis Ababa's correctional centre. The study is important for the correctional centre's employees to increase their knowledge of self-awareness, stress and stress coping among prisoners to an extent and to take action when necessary, on the issues of prisoners. Furthermore, it intends to broaden the knowledge of practitioners about the psychological well-being of prisoners.

## **2. Material and methods**

The study design was descriptive and explanatory. The descriptive type was used to describe the relationship between some components of psychological well-being among prisoners, while the explanatory type was used to explain the behaviour of prisoners in detail. Therefore, the quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to achieve the intended objectives.

### *2.1. Participants*

The target population of the study was 100 prisoners who were pursuing their life in Addis Ababa's correctional centre. The study was conducted in Akaki Kality, which is on the southern suburb border with the districts of Nifas Silk-Lafto and Bole sub-city in Addis Ababa. To meet the study's objective, the researcher selected 100 out of 2,000 prisoners using systematic random sampling techniques to give equal chances to the targeted population and to avoid research bias.

### *2.2. Data collection instrument*

The instrument used in the study was used to collect primary data. A self-administered, 5-point Likert-type questionnaire was the major instrument that was used in data collection. Therefore, 10 self-awareness questions, 10 stress questions and 10 stress-coping questions were used to assess the relationship between prisoners' psychological well-being and duration in prison, in Addis Ababa's Kality Correctional Centre.

After obtaining the cooperation letter from the Department of Pedagogy, the researcher asked the concerned bodies about their willingness to participate in the study. Having received their consent, the questionnaires were administered to the prisoners in the centre. The data were collected after giving a clear explanation of the purpose of the study by the investigator himself.

### *2.3. Study variables*

The predictable variables are age, sex, marital status, birth order, year of stay in prison and educational status, and the consequences/results were based on the variables and components of psychological well-being (i.e., self-awareness, stress and stress coping).

## 2.4. Data analysis

Finally, the collected data were processed and analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 20. Specifically, percentage, frequency and correlation techniques were used to present the analysis of the data.

## 3. Results

Table 1 shows that, out of 100 respondents, 70 (70%) are male and 30 (30%) are female. This shows that most of the respondents were male. The second variable's result shows that 33 (33%) respondents were aged 18–30 years, 39 (39%) respondents were in the average age group of 29–39 years, 20 (20%) respondents were aged 40–50 years and 8 (8%) respondents were in the average age group of 50 years and above. This shows that most of the respondents were found in the average age group of 29–39 years. The third variable's result shows that 40 (40%) respondents are orthodox Christians, 20 (20%) respondents are Muslims, 32 (32%) respondents are Protestants and 8 (8%) respondents are from other religions. This shows that most of the respondents are orthodox Christians.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the study participants

No.	Demographic variables	Respondents		
		F	%	
1	Sex	Male	70	70
		Female	30	30
2	Age	18–28	33	33
		29–39	39	39
		40–50	20	20
		50 and above	8	8
3	Religion	Orthodox Christian	40	40
		Muslim	20	20
		Protestant	32	32
		Others	8	8
4	Educational level	0–8	29	29
		9–12	39	39
		Certificate/diploma	12	12
		Degree and above	20	20
5	Number of families	2–3	25	25
		4–6	45	45
		7 and above	30	30
6	Marital status	Single	40	40
		Married	50	50
		Divorced	5	5
		Widowed	5	5
7	Years of stay in prison	1 and below	30	30
		2–4	40	40

		4–7	20	20
		7 and above	10	10
8	Birth order	First	30	30
		Middle	40	40
		Last	15	15
		Only one	15	15

The fourth variable's result shows that 29 (29%) respondents were elementary school level (1–8), 39 (39%) respondents were high school level (9–12), 12 (12%) respondents were certificate/diploma level and 20 (20%) respondents were educated above degree level. This shows that most of the respondents were high school students. The fifth variable's result shows that 25 (25%) respondents have 2–3 members in the family, 45 (45%) respondents have 4–6 members in the family and 30 (30%) respondents have 7 or more members in the family. This shows that most of the respondents have 4–6 members in the family on average. The sixth variable's result shows that 40 (40%) respondents are unmarried, 50 (50%) respondents are married, 5 (5%) respondents are divorced and 5 (5%) respondents are widowed. This shows that most of the respondents are married.

The seventh variable's result shows that 30 (30%) respondents stayed in prison for 1 or less than 1 year, 40 (40%) respondents stayed in prison for 2–4 years, 20 (20%) respondents stayed in prison for 5–7 years and 10 (10%) respondents stayed in prison for 8 and more than 8 years. This shows that most of the respondents stayed in prison for 2–4 years. The last variable's result shows that 30 (30%) respondents are the first child in their family, 40 (40%) respondents are the middle child in their family, 15 (15%) respondents are the last child in their family and 15 (15%) respondents are the only child in their family. This shows that most of the respondents are middle children in their family. Therefore, these variables are very important to know the nexus between prisoners' psychological well-being and duration in prison at Kality Correctional Centre.

Table 2. Evaluation of the self-awareness scale of the study participants

No.	Decision alternative	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1	I feel that I am a person of worth at least on an equal plane with others	58	58%	20	20%	10	10%	12	12%
2	I feel that I have a number of good qualities	74	74%	15	15%	5	5%	6	6%
3	I feel that I am a failure	25	25%	20	20%	30	30%	25	25%
4	I am able to do many things	30	30%	40	40%	20	20%	10	10%
5	I feel that I do not have much to be proud of	24	24%	27	27%	24	24%	23	23%
6	I have a positive attitude for myself	65	65%	20	20%	5	5%	10	10%
7	Generally, I am satisfied with myself	52	52%	25	25%	10	10%	13	13%
8	I wish I could have more respect for myself	40	40%	30	30%	20	20%	10	10%

9	Sometimes I certainly feel useless	20	20%	20	20%	21	21%	39	39%
10	Sometimes I think I am not good at all	19	19%	21	21%	26	26%	34	34%

F = frequency; P = percentage.

Table 2 shows that for the feeling of being a person of worth at least on an equal plane with others, 58 (58%) respondents strongly agreed, 20 (20%) respondents agreed, but 10 (10%) and the other 12 (12%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. For the feeling of having several good qualities, 74 (74%) respondents strongly agreed and 15 (15%) respondents also agreed. On the other hand, 5 (5%) and the remaining 5 (5%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. On the feeling of being a failure, 25 (25%) respondents strongly agreed and 20 (20%) respondents also agreed. On the other hand, 30 (30%) and 25 (25%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. On the ability to do many things, 30 (30%) respondents strongly agreed that they are and 40 (40%) respondents agreed, but 20 (20%) and 10 (10%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively.

Based on the feeling of not having much to be proud of, 24 (24%) respondents strongly agreed and 27 (27%) respondents agreed, but 24 (24%) and 23 (23%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. On taking a positive attitude towards myself, 65 (65%) respondents strongly agreed and 20 (20%) respondents agreed, but 5 (5%) and 10 (10%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. Based on the feeling of being useless, 52 (52%) respondents strongly agreed and 25 (25%) respondents agreed, but 10 (10%) and 13 (13%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively.

On the feeling of being not good at all, 40 (40%) respondents strongly agreed and 30 (30%) respondents agreed, but 20 (20%) and 10 (10%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. Based on the feeling of being satisfied with himself/herself, 20 (20%) respondents strongly agreed and 20 (20%) respondents agreed, but 21 (21%) and 39 (39%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. On the wish to have more respect for himself/herself, 19 (19%) respondents strongly agreed and 21 (21%) respondents agreed, but 26 (26%) and 34 (34%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively.

Table 3. Evaluation of the stress scale for the study participants

No	Decision alternative	Never		Almost never		Sometimes		Fairly often		Very often	
		F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1	I have been upset because something happened unexpectedly	20	20%	5	5%	50	50%	14	14%	11	11%
2	I felt that I was unable to control important things in my life	30	30%	10	10%	25	25%	12	12%	23	23%
3	I felt nervous and stressed	25	25%	10	10%	35	35%	15	15%	15	15%
4	I feel confident about my ability to handle my personal problems	15	15%	15	15%	13	13%	37	37%	20	20%
5	I felt that things were going my way	21	21%	17	17%	26	26%	25	25%	11	11%
6	I couldn't cope with things that I had to do	40	40%	15	15%	17	17%	16	16%	12	12%
7	I have been able to control relationships in my life	15	15%	5	5%	15	15%	43	43%	22	22%

8	In the last month, I felt that I was on top of things	8	8%	8	8%	24	24%	40	40%	20	20%
9	I have been upset because of things that happened outside of my control	35	35%	15	15%	23	23%	10	10%	17	17%
10	I felt difficulties were pulling up so high that I could not overcome them	36	36%	23	23%	19	19%	6	6%	16	16%

F = Frequency; P = Percentage.

Table 3 shows that for being upset because something happened unexpectedly, 20 (20%) respondents said never, 5 (5%) said almost never, 50 (50%) said sometimes, 14 (14%) said fairly often and the rest 11 (11%) said very often. This result shows that most of the respondents stated that they sometimes feel upset because something happened unexpectedly.

Based on the feeling of being unable to control important things in their life, 30 (30%) respondents said never, 10 (10%) said seldom, 25 (25%) said sometimes, 12 (12%) said fairly often and the rest 23 (23%) said very often. This result shows that most of the respondents stated that they never feel unable to control important things in their life. Based on feeling nervous and stressed, 25 (25%) respondents said never, 5 (10%) said seldom, 35 (35%) said sometimes, 15 (15%) said fairly often and the rest 15 (15%) said very often. This result shows that most of the respondents stated that they sometimes feel nervous and stressed. On feeling confident about their ability to handle personal problems, 15 (15%) respondents said never, 15 (15%) said seldom, 13 (13%) said sometimes, 37 (37%) said fairly often and the rest 20 (20%) said very often. This result shows that most of the respondents stated that they fairly often feel confident about their ability to handle personal problems. Based on the feeling that things were going their way, 21 (21%) respondents said never, 17 (17%) said seldom, 26 (26%) said sometimes, 25 (25%) said fairly often and the rest 11 (11%) said very often. This result shows that most of the respondents stated that they sometimes feel that things are going their way.

Based on the feeling of not being able to cope with all things that they had to do, 40 (40%) respondents said never, 15 (15%) said seldom, 17 (17%) said sometimes, 16 (16%) said fairly often and the rest 12 (12%) said very often. This result shows that most of the respondents never felt that they could cope with all things they had to do. On being able to control relationships in their life, 15 (15%) respondents said never, 5 (5%) said seldom, 15 (15%) said sometimes, 43 (43%) said fairly often and the rest 22 (22%) said very often. This result shows that most of the respondents stated that they fairly often feel able to control relationships in their life. Based on the feeling that they were on top of things in the last month, 8 (8%) respondents say never, 8 (8%) said seldom, 24 (24%) said sometimes, 40 (40%) said fairly often and the rest 20 (20%) said very often. This result shows that most of the respondents stated that they fairly often feel that they were on top of things in the last month.

Based on being upset because of things that happened outside of their control, 35 (35%) respondents said never, 15 (15%) said seldom, 23 (23%) said sometimes, 10 (10%) said fairly often and the rest 17 (17%) said very often. This result shows that most of the respondents stated that they never feel upset because of things that happened outside of their control.



Based on the feeling that difficulties were pulling up so high that they could not overcome them, 36 (36%) respondents said never, 23 (23%) said seldom, 19 (19%) said sometimes, 6 (6%) said fairly often and the rest 16 (16%) said very often. This result shows that most of the respondents stated that they never felt that difficulties were pulling up so high that they could not overcome them.

Table 4. Evaluation of the stress coping mechanism for the study participants

No	Decision alternative	Agree		Strongly agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1	I try to avoid situations which force me to be worried	34	34%	48	48%	11	11%	7	7%
2	I feel free condition in worried conditions	38	38%	23	23%	24	24%	15	15%
3	It is easy for me to relax when I am with worried situations	16	16%	13	13%	51	51%	20	20%
4	I usually feel comfortable when nervous conditions occurred	21	21%	7	7%	51	51%	31	31%
5	I usually feel at ease when stressful situations happened	51	51%	29	29%	14	14%	6	6%
6	I try to avoid things that will make up my mind	34	34%	26	26%	19	19%	21	21%
7	I often went to get away from stressful circumstance	43	43%	21	21%	18	18%	18	18%
8	I usually feel relaxed when I am still with stressful circumstances	40	40%	19	19%	24	24%	17	17%
9	I usually feel uncomfortable when I am living in uncomfortable environment	30	30%	9	9%	47	47%	8	8%
10	I often feel nervous stressed with psychological behaviour which causes stress	49	49%	18	18%	19	19%	14	14%

F = Frequency; P = Percentage.

Table 4 shows that based on trying to avoid situations which force them to be worried 34 (34%) respondents agree, 48 (48%) respondents strongly agree, but 11 (11%) and the other 7 (7%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This shows that most of the respondents strongly agreed. Based on feeling free in worried situations, 38 (38%) respondents agreed and 23 (23%) strongly agree. On the other hand, 24 (24%) and 15 (15%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This shows that most of the respondents agreed. Based on it being easy for them to relax when they are in a worrying situation, 16 (16%) respondents agreed and 13 (13%) respondents strongly agreed. On the other hand, 51 (51%) and 20 (20%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This shows that most of the respondents disagreed. On feeling comfortable when nervous conditions happen, 11 (11%) respondents agreed that they are and 7 (7%) respondents strongly agreed, but 51 (51%) and 31 (31%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This shows that most of the respondents disagreed.

Based on ease when stressful situations happen usually, 51 (51%) respondents agreed and 29 (29%) respondents strongly agree, but 14 (14%) and 6 (6%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This shows that most of the respondents agreed. Based on trying to avoid things that will make up their minds, 34 (34%) respondents agreed and 26 (26%) respondents



strongly agreed, but 19 (19%) and 21 (21%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This shows that most of the respondents agreed. Based on getting away from stressful circumstances, 43 (43%) respondents agreed and 21 (21%) respondents strongly agreed, but 18 (18%) and 18 (18%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This shows that most of the respondents agreed.

Based on the feeling of getting relaxed when they are still under stressful circumstances, 40 (40%) respondents strongly agreed and 19 (19%) respondents agreed, but 24 (24%) and 17 (17%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This shows that most of the respondents agreed. On the feeling of comfort when they are living in an uncomfortable environment, 30 (30%) respondents agreed and 9 (9%) respondents strongly agreed, but 47 (47%) and 8 (8%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This shows that most of the respondents disagreed. Based on the feeling of being nervous about psychological behaviour which causes stress, 49 (49%) respondents agreed and 18 (18%) respondents strongly agree, but 19 (19%) and 14 (14%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively. This shows that most of the respondents agreed.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. *The relationship between the duration in prison and self-awareness, stress and stress coping*

One of the objectives of this study was to assess the relationship between the duration in prison and psychological reactions to imprisonment, within the strongest emotional stress reactions. To do this, percentage, frequency and correlation techniques were used to analyse the relationship between the duration in prison and psychological reactions to imprisonment. Therefore, the result indicated that there is a significant relationship between the duration in prison and some components of psychological well-being (i.e., self-awareness, stress and stress coping) among the prisoners. And other two components (self-awareness and stress coping) and stress were negatively correlated with the duration in prison. Similarly, previous studies indicated that defects in self-awareness skills are related to life in prison (Clayton & Opatow, 2003). So, emotional stress can be expressed or practiced in many ways; anxiety is one of them. Anxiety is usually quite low and some acceptance of prison life is generally gained (Bartol & Bartol, 2018).

The first objective of this study is the relationship between the length of being imprisoned and inmates' stress coping. The results of the correlation analyses revealed that there is no significant relationship between any of the stress coping mechanisms and length of imprisonment. On the contrary, previous studies indicated that there is a reliable relationship between imprisoned length and any measure of adaptation (Zamble & Porporino, 2013). Therefore, there have been inconsistent findings and results about the relationship between self-awareness and life in prison in Addis Ababa's Kality Correctional Centre.

Lois, Linke, and Wessa (2014) identified only a small number of studies reporting lower self-awareness in offender samples before 1980. However, a low relationship between prisoners and self-awareness may operate through the low locus of control since many prisoners are externally oriented in their ability to affect change or have control in their environment (i.e., internal control).

Studies on stress have said that prisoners are uncomfortable in stressful environments (Roy, 1993). The person who suffers the acute pain of imprisonment necessarily manifests psychological discomforts, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, or other forms of disability may be in the form of a diminished sense of self-worth and personal value. These psychological problems and the effects of life in prison vary from individual to individual (Finlayson, Baker, Rodman, & Herzberg, 2002). Therefore, there is a low relationship between prisoners' self-awareness and locus of control in the prison in Addis Ababa's Kality Correctional Centre.

#### *4.2. Gender difference in prisoners' level of stress, self-awareness and stress coping*

The second objective of this study was to assess statistical gender differences in prisoners' levels of stress and self-awareness. The findings indicate that there is a significant statistical gender difference in prisoners' levels of stress and self-awareness. Similarly, Wolff, Shi, and Siegel (2009) indicated that females are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma than men; post-traumatic stress disorder is more prevalent among female prisoners. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that trauma experienced by female prisoners strongly influences offending behaviour. Therefore, there is a significant statistical gender difference in prisoners' level of stress and self-awareness in prison in Addis Ababa's Kality Correctional Centre.

#### *4.3. The relationship between age of prisoners' self-awareness, stress and stress coping*

The third objective of this study was to assess the relationship between the age of prisoners' self-awareness, stress and coping mechanisms. The results of the finding revealed that there is a relationship between the age of prisoners and self-awareness. Similarly, previous studies indicated that younger prisoners aged 25 or below are initially more resistant to the prison structure which makes them more likely to be stressed than older inmates who assume passive avoidance roles in prison (McCorkle, 1992). However, it has been suggested that after the initial shock of imprisonment, younger inmates tend to demonstrate an increasing level of conformity over time (Bartol & Bartol, 2018). On the contrary, the study shows that there is no significant relationship between some components of psychological well-being (i.e., self-awareness, stress coping and stress) and the age of the prisoners.

### **5. Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made: There is a significant difference between male and female prisoners based on the components of psychological well-being (i.e., self-awareness, stress and stress coping). The results show a significant relationship between the duration of stay in prison and the components of psychological well-being (i.e., self-awareness, stress and stress coping) among the prisoners of Hosanna.

Based on the components of psychological well-being studied in this research, stress has an inverse relationship with duration in prison (i.e., as the length of imprisonment increases, the prisoner's adaptation to stress increases and the level of stress decreases). Interaction should be maintained by creating favourable conditions for the prisoner to develop a sense of good interaction when he/she is

in the prison or/and after returning to society. They should practice different physical exercises following a flexible schedule.

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