

Journeys of recovery from alcohol dependence: a thematic analysis of personal accounts viewed through the lens of CBS

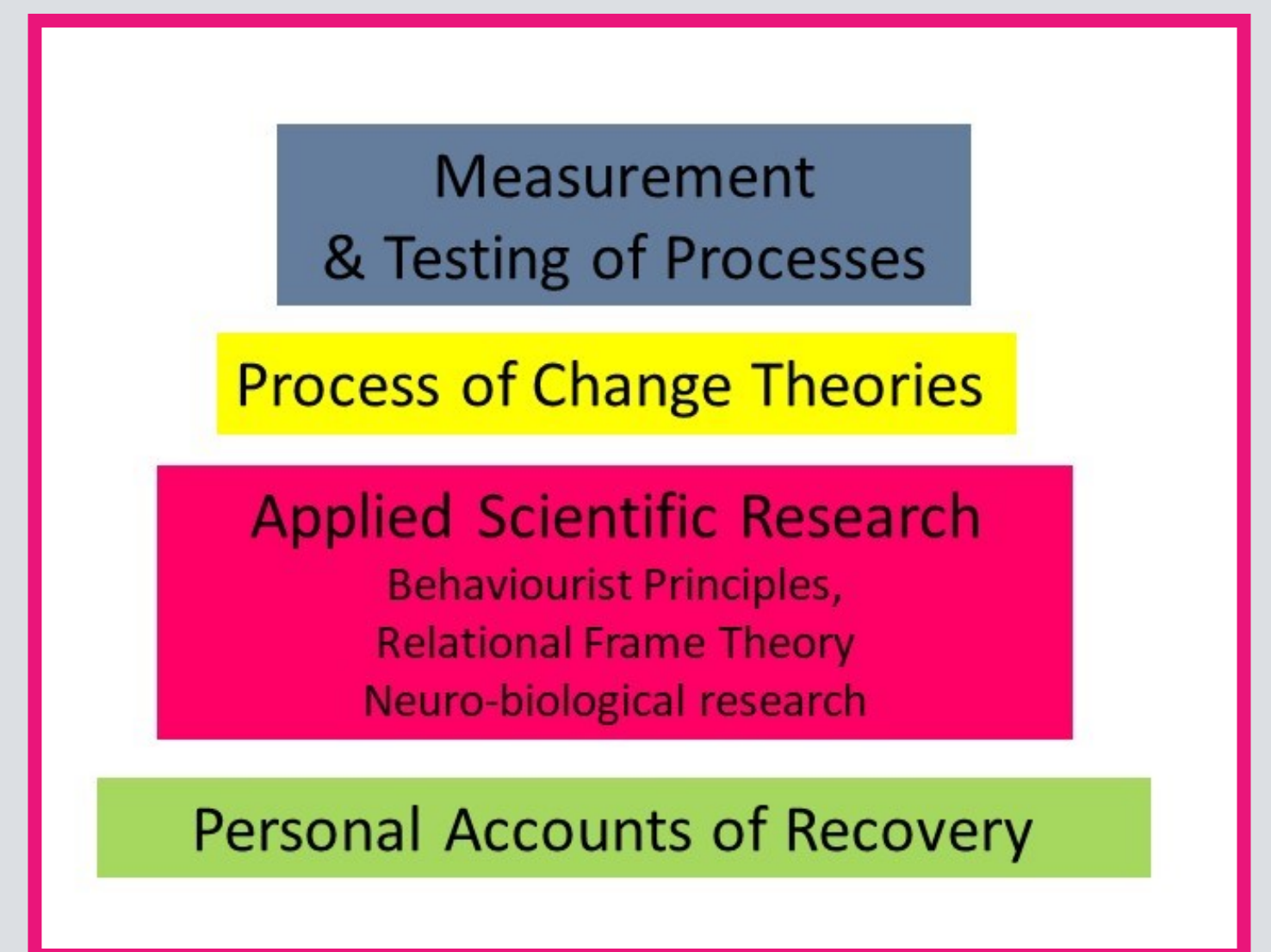
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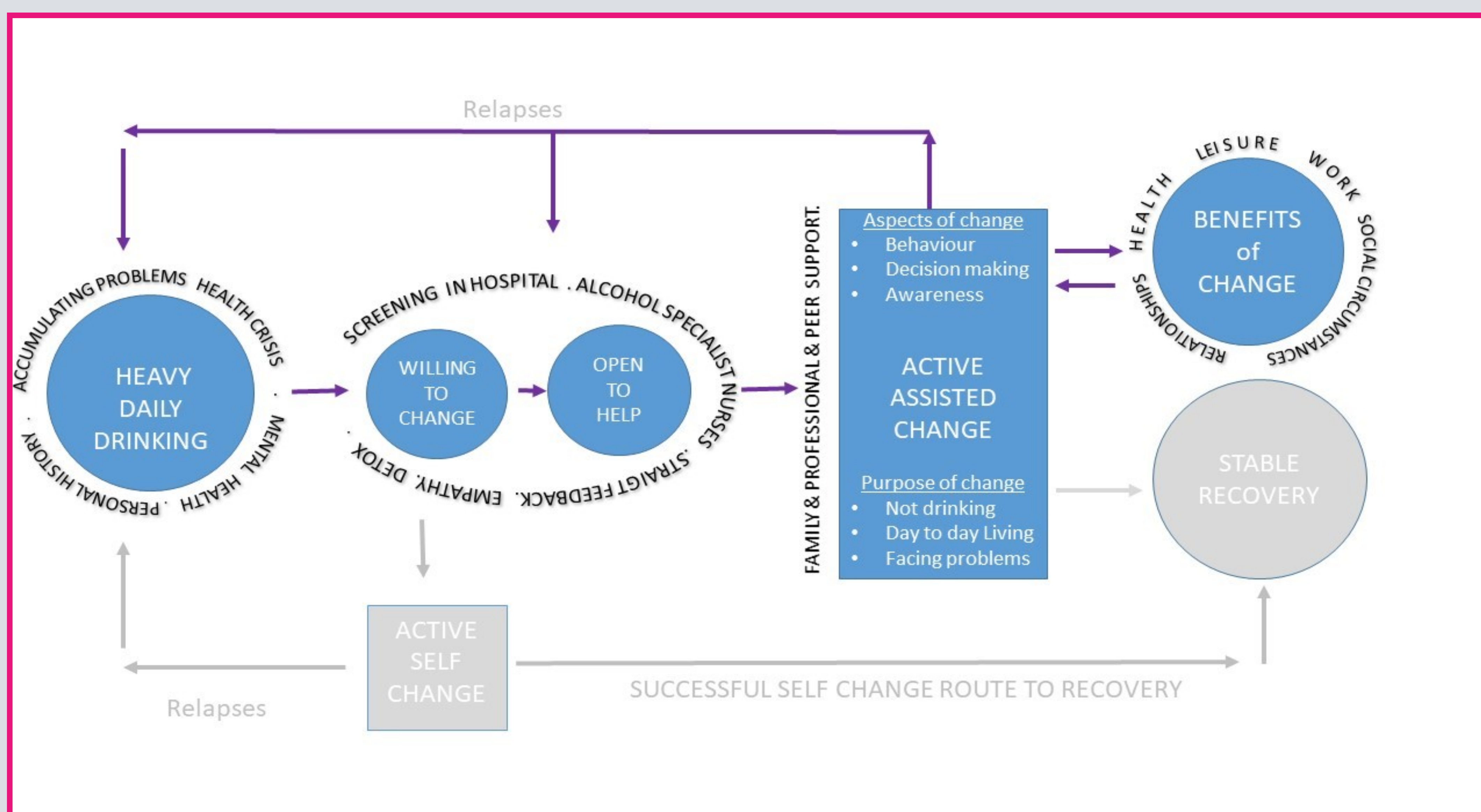
Introduction and method

Recovery from alcohol dependence has been described as a long term process of change often involving several sources of help and treatment episodes. Qualitative research offers insights into complex long term processes that experimental studies often fail to capture. One limitation of personal accounts of recovery is that they only capture the process of change that the person is aware of. Theory is often applied to a qualitative analysis to gain further insights, but there are a wide range of theories to choose from, creating a confusing picture. Contextual Behavioural Science principles and theory combined with personal accounts offers a 'bottom up' approach to understanding the process of change which could bring more clarity to the field.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-four participants who completed alcohol detoxification in a general hospital; interviews took place at several points over a year. Participants were asked about the changes they had made, and specific examples of change were elicited. Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, and principles compatible with a contextual behavioural perspective were used to develop a theoretical model of change.



A 'bottom up' approach



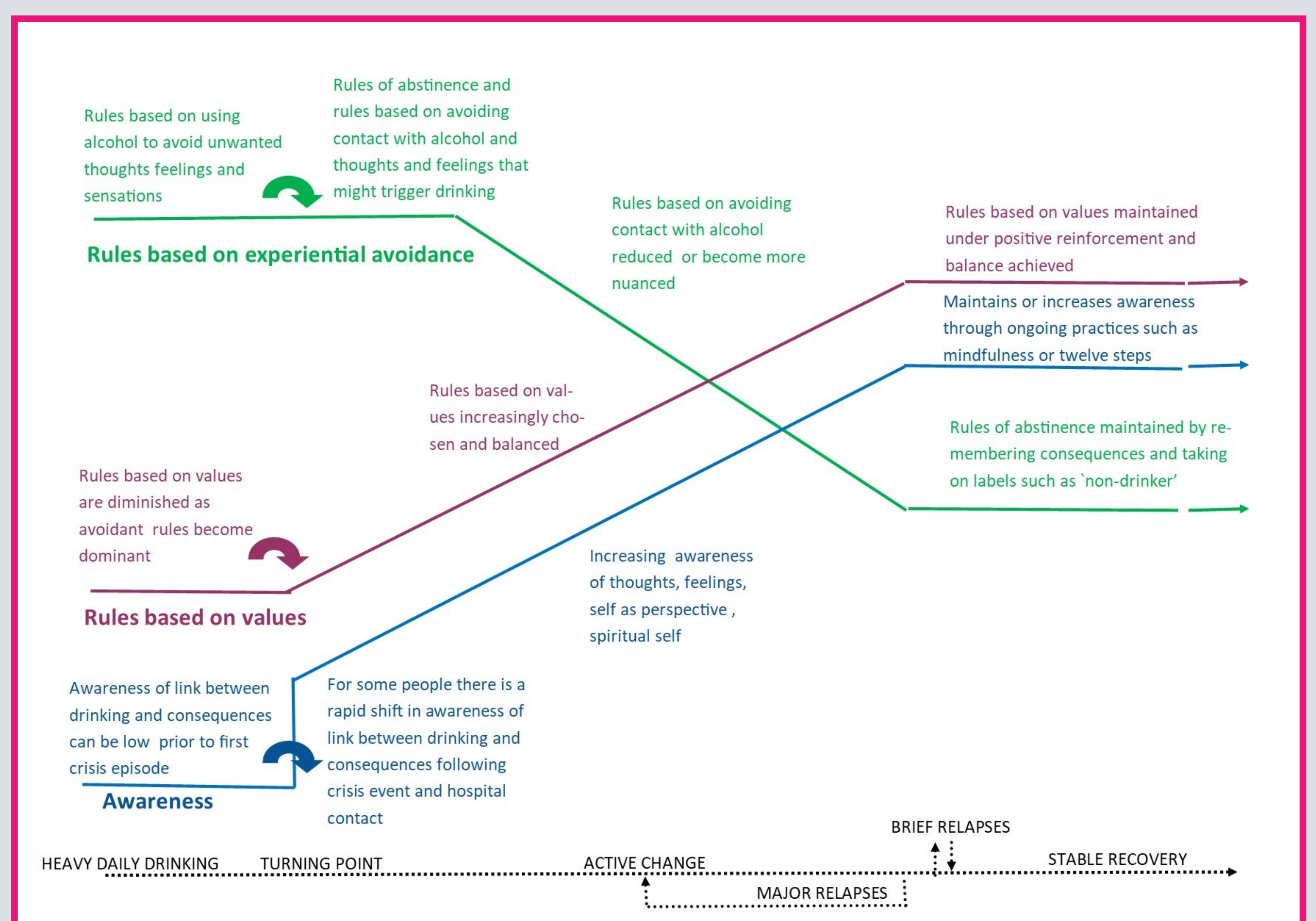
Stages of change based on patient accounts and literature review

Findings– patient perspectives

A crisis event leading to hospital contact often provided an opportunity to change direction. Opening up to nurses who were empathic and gave straight talking feedback contributed to a willingness to change and openness to help. Active change involved changes in awareness, behaviour and decision making towards three common purposes: not drinking, day to day living and facing problems. Those who progressed in recovery experienced many direct benefits of change.

CBS Analysis and Conclusion

Professional, family and peer-group relationships provided opportunities for validation of expressions of vulnerability and experiences of commonality with others. New 'rules' were adopted in order to initiate abstinence, which involved avoiding alcohol and triggers; as awareness increased, avoidance based rules were gradually replaced by those that led to engagement with rewarding aspects of living. Maintenance required ongoing active strategies even when new behaviours were established by reinforcement. Contextual behavioural science combined with personal accounts of recovery offers insight into common processes of change underlying recovery from alcohol dependence across different routes to recovery; these processes warrant further research.



A model of the process of change in early recovery from alcohol dependence

Key References:

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