

An Ecological View of Psychological Trauma, Trauma Recovery and Resilience:

VOV's varied services and program components reflect the organizing influence of an ecological view of psychological trauma and trauma recovery. Drawing directly upon the ecological perspective of community psychology, this framework proposes that individual differences in traumatic response (and, indeed, in risk of traumatic exposure) are the result of complex interactions among person, event and environmental factors. Interdependent and reciprocal interactions among these factors set the stage for more or less resilient and agentic responses to traumatic exposure, help to determine the quality and availability of informal sources of social support and underlie both access to and comfort with professional care.

The ecological model includes a definition of trauma recovery that is hallmarked by achievements in eight domains of psychological functioning. Resilience is understood to be a multidimensional phenomenon. A survivor may be seriously impaired in one or more domains typically impacted by trauma and yet evince remarkable strengths in others. Resilience is also conceptualized as an active process by which individual survivors are able to access strengths in some domains in order to secure recovery in others. An important goal of psychotherapy with trauma survivors is to recognize and help the survivor mobilize his or her resilient capacities.

Recognizing that most trauma survivors will not turn to psychotherapy (or any other highly specialized form of professional care), the ecological framework also acknowledges the importance of environmental interventions to foster wellness and enhance resilience among untreated trauma survivors and their communities. At VOV, environmental interventions towards these ends include not only the CCRT, VAST and the CHB, but also year-round staff involvement in anti-violence coalitions, public education campaigns and human rights activism.

Ecologically Informed Intervention and Research at the VOV:

The ecological framework provides theoretical foundation for clinical care, community intervention and research at VOV.

Clinical Assessment and Clinical Care:

Clinical intervention at VOV begins with an assessment that attends not only to signs and symptoms of distress but also to attitudes and values prevailing in the larger society and in the client's cultural context and home community. It asks the clinician to inquire not only about the behavior of family members and friends, but also about the actions of medical, mental health and social service providers, criminal justice personnel, and religious and community figures. One goal of this assessment is insight into the ways in which clients' location in complex ecological networks shapes their experience of and adaptive (and/or maladaptive) coping with trauma. Another is that assessment set the stage for care that will foster safer connections with others and new, more empowered action in the world outside of therapy.

Community Intervention, Social Advocacy and Social Action: Within VOV the aims of community-wide interventions are guided by respect for ecological context. The goals of community intervention are to address the community's vulnerability and promote community healing, not by replacing or overwhelming but rather by augmenting and enhancing existing community resources. These aims infuse all VOV services but are perhaps most clearly recognized in the outreach, consultation and intervention strategies of the CCRT and in VAST's integration of individual and social advocacy practices

Ecologically-informed Research on Resilience in Trauma Survivors: The ecological model suggests that full understanding of psychological trauma, recovery and resilience requires research with both treated and untreated survivors and the delineation of factors relevant to recovery in both populations. Research at VOV, therefore, incorporates attention to the experience of trauma survivors from diverse contexts and at

various points in the recovery process, as well as inquiry into the cross-cultural applicability of constructs and assessment tools developed in the context of our Trauma Recovery and Resiliency Research Project.