

The Socio- Interpersonal (Social) Model of PTSD

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The Socio-Interpersonal or Social Model of PTSD was developed by Andreas Maercker, a Swiss psychologist. He introduced this model to emphasise how social and interpersonal factors can play a more central role than solely biological mechanisms or memory alterations in both the development and recovery from PTSD. Shifting the lens from exclusively individual-centric theories toward a broader, relational understanding of trauma and healing.

Key ideas of the Social Model of PTSD:

- Trauma isn't just an individual wound → it often arises from social conditions
- Healing isn't just about the individual → recovery requires supportive communities
- Context matters → PTSD symptoms are survival responses shaped by unsafe environments

- Social responses can worsen or ease trauma → stigma, disbelief, and isolation can intensify PTSD, while validation, community, and justice can support recovery
- Responsibility lies beyond the survivor → instead of locating “the problem” within the traumatised person, it recognises the role of perpetrators, oppressive systems, and societal neglect

Why is this important?

The social model of PTSD challenges the purely medicalised, individualised lens that often blames or pathologises survivors. It invites us to see trauma as a collective issue, calling for:

- Safer communities
- Recognition of systemic oppression
- Community-led and culturally grounded healing practices

Medical Model	Social Model
PTSD is a mental disorder within the individual.	PTSD is shaped by social + systemic conditions.
Symptoms are seen as pathology.	Symptoms are survival responses.
Focus on diagnosis + treatment (therapy, meds).	Focus on community, justice, and support.
Trauma is seen as an individual event.	Trauma is rooted in violence, oppression, and injustice.
Healing is the person's responsibility.	Healing is a shared responsibility.

Extensions to Complex PTSD (CPTSD)

The Cascade Model of CPTSD is an extension of the social model of PTSD to include CPTSD. It shows how childhood trauma can flow into attachment wounds, shape how we relate to others, and impact social support. These social-interpersonal pathways strongly influence the development of CPTSD and our ability to heal.

References:

- **Socio-interpersonal model of PTSD**

Maercker, A., & Horn, A. B. (2013). A socio-interpersonal perspective on PTSD: The case for environments and interpersonal processes. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*.

- **Cascade model of CPTSD**

Maercker, A., Thoma, M. V., Rohner, S., & Brühl, A. (2021). A cascade model of complex posttraumatic stress disorder centered on childhood trauma, attachment, and social–interpersonal factors. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*.