

---

# Ecological Systems Theory Analysis And Its Implications In Bullying

Social work is grounded on the idea that an individual is an active product of their environment (Rogers, 2014). By viewing a person through this lens, a holistic picture emerges—one that allows the interventionist to explore how an individual is influenced by systems they come from and then employ useful interventions. Ecological theory is the 1979 accomplishment of theorist Urie Brofenbrenner (Rogers, 2014). Brofenbrenner viewed human conduct as a result of the individual dynamically navigating their communal systems (Rogers, 2014). Systems are composed of archetypes which include such agencies as the family unit, educational background, and the greater social circle—which then come together to author much of an individual's behavioral structure (Rogers, 2014). Brofenbrenner delineated these realms as the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem (Rogers, 2014).

Brofenbrenner's ecological theory then marries the individual to their environment, and further demarcates the relationship between the two (Rogers, 2014). He notes both one's development and their environment are in a state of constant fluctuation, of which the individual marks a key role (Rogers, 2014). All of humanity flows from a pretext of nature and nurture; with both positive as well as adverse inclinations that surface due to an amalgamation of biology with one's environment (Rogers, 2014). Furthermore, the theory notes a person's experience is distinct to that individual. For example, two individuals in similar atmospheres may each be going through the cessation of a marriage. One individual interprets it as a chance to start anew. The other views the divorce as the worst time of their life and lacks hope for the future. One's view of their experience directly impacts their health, and coping mechanisms will enhance or reduce their capacity to function (Rogers, 2014). Another key component of ecological theory is "direct cause and effect relationships do not exist (Cross & Barnes, 2014)." Theorists find it senseless to censure individual family members for behaviors in a family as behavior is cyclical and the root cause of it is complex—it cannot simply be traced back to one family member or another (Cross & Barnes, 2014).

Ecological theory is a foundational piece of addressing many public health issues, including bullying behavior (Cross & Barnes, 2014). The family systems school of thought is comparable to ecological theory, with an addition of further emphasis on the family system (Cross & Barnes, 2014). Both theories propose bullying is not simply an individual deed, but rather stems from a child's systems. This concept is especially relevant when looking at, "...communication patterns, strategies for dealing with conflict and stress, and tensions between autonomy and connectedness (Cross & Barnes, 2014)." Thus, interference could include investigating parenting influences such as, "...communication, parent modelling, parenting style, parent bullying attitudes and beliefs, normative standards about bullying, family management techniques, connectedness, and cohesion (Cross & Barnes, 2014)." This comprehensive model has produced positive impact in decreasing bullying (Cross & Barnes, 2014). Families foster a pattern of behavior when challenged with either transformation or stressors (Cross & Barnes, 2014).

These behaviors will provide an environment for the child which will be healthy or detrimental (Cross & Barnes, 2014). In times of tribulation a family may offer support, thus strengthening

---

their bond, or if lacking in communication they may falter in preserving what little stability they already had (Cross & Barnes, 2014). While there may be a predisposition to hostility, using violence to manage difficulties can start at home—as positive feedback solidifies and rewards violent behavior (Cross & Barnes, 2014). If a child sees resolution through hostile behavior (particularly distress, submission, or anger), the positive feedback seed has been planted (Cross & Barnes, 2014). The bullying is often a subconscious, cultivated reaction employed by a child to safeguard themselves. In ecological theory, practitioners may start out by making an ecomap for the client. The map depicts the systems at play, and helps deduce strengths and stressors. Figure 1 depicts the case of Shae Loucks, a 27-year-old female who suffers from severe Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She stated her close family and friends are imperative. Her significant stressors are graduate school, money, and housing. She stated her close social circle was her only source of support after she was sexually assaulted.

A professional may explore adding more supports with her family and friends (perhaps scheduling regular phone calls), brainstorming stress reduction and anti-anxiety techniques, and exploring further coping/therapy techniques for managing the CPTSD. Ecological theory explores the person as a whole—not merely their physical diagnoses but the systems which the individual came from. While the theory has been criticized for the sheer range of background information it sifts through—meaning each practitioner could suggest varying interventions, thus making the process feel unscientific—it is capable of getting to the core of a person and is particularly useful in family therapy (Rogers, 2014). The theory can help practitioners take a keen look at clients' competence in coping and adjustment—which are both tangible ways to make significant difference in one's life (Rogers, 2014). Change at an individual level reverberates through systems, thus fostering additional protective factors in one's family or community to incite positive change.