

Stress Vulnerability Model

The most popular model used to explain psychosis is the Stress Vulnerability Model. This model involves three factors:

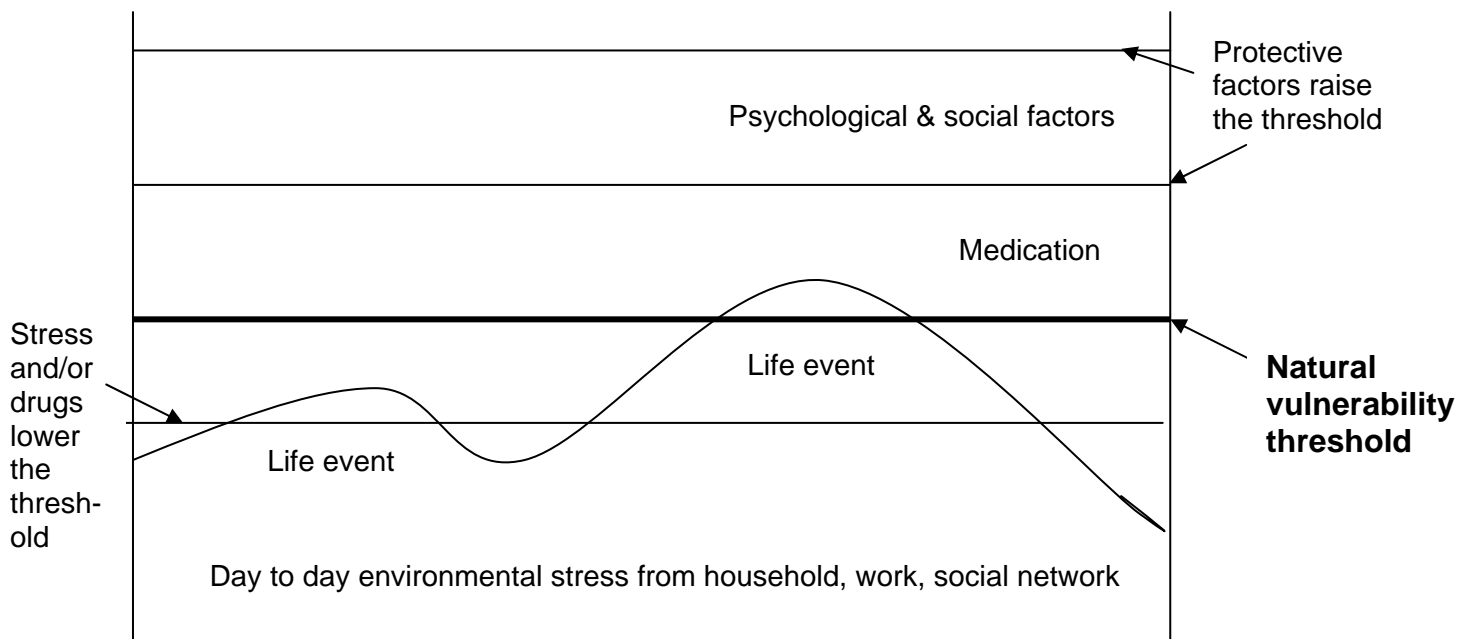
- 1. Vulnerability factors.** This refers to the biological factors which predispose an individual to develop psychosis. The exact explanation for this biological vulnerability remains unclear, but it is thought to be linked to genetic factors.
- 2. Environmental factors.** In conjunction with vulnerability factors, these influence the onset and course of the symptoms.
 - Living in an environment where there is a great deal of conflict, criticism or negativity may contribute to psychosis.
 - Use of drugs such as speed or cannabis may also be contributing factors for some individuals.
 - Stressors that may trigger episodes of psychosis include accumulation of day to day hassles in an individual's life, or more specific life events such as the death of someone close, a relationship breakdown, a change in residence or the loss of a job.

According to the stress vulnerability model, psychosis emerges when stress exceeds an individual's '**vulnerability threshold**'.

There is currently no way of predicting what an individual's threshold is.

- 3. Protective factors.** These act as a buffer against the effects of stress and biochemical vulnerabilities or help minimise the severity of symptoms. A key protective factor may be medication. Other protective factors include stress management, social support and effective problem solving skills.

These influences are summarised on the following chart.



You can see from the chart that the person would develop psychotic symptoms when the second life event occurs, as this level of stress would take them above their vulnerability threshold. However, if they are taking medication or there are other protective factors in place, the vulnerability threshold would be raised and they would not develop psychosis. Drugs and/or continuous stress lower the vulnerability threshold.