

Case Example: Jenny

Discussion Points

Presenting Problem

Jenny, a 15-year-old Hispanic girl, attends an inner-city high school where she was recently the victim of a beating. Formerly a good student, Jenny has now been refusing to go to school. Her school counselor calls the house and learns that Jenny is often agitated and has been having frequent nightmares. She refers Jenny to the school-based mental health provider.

The Peer and Social Context

The therapist initiates a phone conversation with Jenny, who reveals that she was only trying to be friendly with a boy outside of class, when one of the girls in a clique accused her of trying to ‘steal’ her boyfriend. She was cornered and viciously beaten. Now, she says, “these girls and their friends are always watching for me. I can’t go to school, and I can’t go anywhere else around here either. That is making it hard for my mom, because she doesn’t speak English and she usually asks me to help with translation when she goes to get groceries or takes my brother to soccer practice at the park. She doesn’t understand the way it is here.”

The Family and Cultural Context

Suspecting that Jenny is experiencing posttraumatic stress from the beating incident, the therapist asks Jenny whether she and her mother could come in to school for an appointment. Jenny is very hesitant, explaining that she is afraid to go to school. At that point, Jenny also discloses that her father was killed as a result of political affiliations in El Salvador, and she is doubtful that her mother will trust enough to come in to the office. It appears that Jenny’s experience at school has also shaken up her mother.

The bilingual therapist speaks with Jenny’s mother on the phone, who complains, “Why did my daughter have to flirt with that boy? Now we are having a hard time in our home, because of her talking too much!” The therapist inquires further, and the mother makes references to the hardships they endured in El Salvador, which led to the need to immigrate to this country. She breaks down crying, saying, “Her father was the same way! He was always talking openly about his political beliefs, and then they came and took him away! I have tried to give my daughter everything, but she is becoming too outspoken. Now we have a hard time here, too.”

Based on the information presented so far, describe possible diagnostic considerations and a preliminary treatment plan.



How do challenges in Jenny’s peer and social world interfere with her functioning?

Taking into consideration your knowledge of culturally competent services, how would you engage the family in treatment?

How would you address the intergenerational and acculturation stressors that are exacerbating Jenny’s distress?

How does the mother’s own trauma history play a role in this situation?

How does additional information about the cultural and family context change the original diagnostic considerations and treatment plan you described earlier?