

Clinical Vignettes

Carlos

Carlos is a 17-year-old undocumented Mexican American with no previous psychiatric history. He was sent to the school mental health clinic by his 11th grade teachers for a marked change in behaviors. While previously an honors student looking forward to attending college, Carlos reports that his grades have recently dropped due to “constant stress.” In addition to schoolwork, Carlos was previously involved in extracurricular activities and part-time employment to support his family. When probed about his future, Carlos feels that college is “no longer an option” because of the uncertainty surrounding the DACA program. Constant worries about deportation have made everyday activities like attending school and shopping for groceries challenging and fear-ridden for Carlos and his family. [READ MORE](#)

This fear is greatly compounded for Carlos as the U.S. is the only country he has known; he has not been back to Mexico since age 2. Given the current socio-political climate, he has become progressively depressed, outwardly irritable, and withdrawn. He reports hopelessness, poor appetite, and nightmares of deportation.

Carlos's parents are also struggling. They have lost their jobs because of their respective employers' concerns about their immigration status. While they have found odd jobs to make ends meet, the overall financial stress level in the home is very high. This has led to strained family dynamics including nightly verbal arguments between his parents, who are also experiencing their own severe stress and psychiatric symptoms.

Doña Carmen

Doña Carmen, a middle-aged woman from South America who has lived in the U.S. for a year, presents for treatment of depression. She describes herself as “stable” with the ability to engage in her preferred daily activities. She identifies psychotherapy and antidepressant medication as being important to her recovery. Shortly after arriving in the United States, she noticed an increase in symptoms: depressed mood, restlessness, and a growing obsession of being watched by people and criticized.

A psychiatric evaluation reveals the onset of new psychotic symptoms. Doña Carmen is mistrustful and paranoid. She believes that someone has placed a mal de ojo which is contributing to her difficulties. She now refuses to socially engage with others. In conversation with her primary care provider, the social worker learns that Doña Carmen shares that she is worried about her fate since the government announced policy changes related to certain immigrant groups. She believes her safety in this country is no longer assured and has repeatedly stated, “I just don’t know who I can trust anymore.”

Juan

Juan is a recent 14-year-old immigrant from Nicaragua who has recently been acting increasingly withdrawn from his family and neighborhood friends. Juan's parents are concerned because he avoids being seen in public with his family, has asked that people start calling him "John," and has started decorating his bedroom with pictures of European American celebrities. Juan has made negative and stereotypic comments about Latinos and recently expressed an interest in dating someone who is not Latino. Juan's grades in school have dropped over the past semester and he stays in his room a great deal. His parents mention their concerns to the school counselor and are given the name of a local clinician to contact for counseling.

Jorge

Jorge is a 28-year-old married, male recently immigrated from El Salvador. He works part time cleaning offices and homes and is the father of two young children (one aged four years, the other aged nine months) is recommended to meet with you by her clergy. Over the past few weeks, he has been experiencing symptoms of fatigue, insomnia, headache, abdominal discomfort, and difficulty concentrating at work. He is not diagnosed with any medical disorders. To help manage some of his symptoms he is experiencing he uses herbs that he grows in his garden. He is slightly disheveled and appears to not trust many people. He reports that he has not slept in several days.

Fernando

Fernando is a 53-year-old male who has been living in the United States for the past five years. He immigrated from Guatemala. He reports that he has been experiencing Ataques de nervios He reports having experiencing thoughts and not always feeling comfortable with different events in his life. He presents with feelings of worry. He worries all of the time and about "everything under the sun." He worries how he will provide for his family and how to care for an ill family member. He also reports concerns with his sleep, impatience with others, difficulty focusing at work, and significant back and muscle tension. He reports that these symptoms appear to have fluctuated and were more intense when he first came to the United States and recently after starting a new job.

Alejandra

Alejandra, a 32-year-old female immigrant from Honduras 7 months ago. She has been experiencing PTSD symptoms for more than five years. She consistently avoided thoughts and images related to witnessing some family members being physically attacked in her native country. She reports that she believed that her uncle was going to be killed. She still experiences flash backs, nightmares and it is difficult for her to be in large groups of people. Since arriving to the United States, Alejandra has become increasingly depressed and began using alcohol on a daily basis to help assuage her PTSD symptoms. She had difficulties in her employment, missing many days of work, and she reported feeling disconnected and numb around her husband and children.

Questions For Vignette:

1. What treatment factors do you feel are important for social workers to consider in working with your case?
2. How would you apply the social work Code of Ethics to this case? How might considerations of the social work Code of Ethics influence how you work with this client?
3. How would you work towards developing increased cultural competence with your case?
4. What efforts could you make as a social worker working with this case to promote social justice for this case?
5. Considering the Social Work Structural Theory how would this influence how you work with this case and what you consider?
- 6.