

Running head: PRUETT CASE STUDY

Pruett Case Study  
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### Introduction to Client

Denise Pruett is a 15 year-old Caucasian adolescent who is currently living at Patton Cottage. Ms. Pruett is in State's custody because she was engaging in risky behaviors (drug and alcohol use, unprotected sex) and not attending school regularly. When she did attend school, she physically fought with other students and as a result, was often suspended. While Ms. Pruett is now attending school regularly and is no longer involved with drugs, she still suffers from other issues.

### Evaluation of Systems

Ms. Pruett is now an eighth grade student at Brown Middle School. In her initial interview, the client stated that while her grades have been poor in the past, she is currently striving to excel in school. She also shared her hopes to, one day, have a career as a pediatrician. She has a history of drug abuse and subsequently, has been treated at Bradford Health Services where she received alcohol and drug treatment. She continues to receive aftercare services from Bradford Health Services and stated that she is no longer involved in drug or alcohol abuse. Ms. Pruett reported that she has a boyfriend and is sexually active, however, she reported that she does not use any form of contraceptive. The client, Ms. Pruett, also denied feeling depressed or suffering from anxiety attacks.

Ms. Pruett enjoys a relationship with her mother, sister and maternal grandmother; however she reported that she has not had contact with her father for approximately five years. Her memories of her father are somewhat vague and limited, however she did state that the recollections of her father often include his use of illegal drugs and alcohol. One of Ms. Pruett's strengths is the positive influence and encouragement her grandmother and sister provide. While the client has recognized that she does not suffer from clinical depression, Ms. Pruett is currently suffering emotionally from the recent death of her brother,

and the death of her sister's boyfriend, both of whom she shared a close bond with.

The State of Tennessee has asked Partnership Counseling Services to perform a mental health assessment to determine whether Ms. Pruett would benefit from counseling. As stated previously, she is currently living at Patton Cottage and receiving some community-based assistance, like aftercare (for previous drug and alcohol use) from Bradford Health Services. Patton Cottage provides a healthy, stable, drug-free environment for the client to work towards some of her goals: stay sober, attend and excel in school. While she admitted that Patton Cottage has rules that she must follow, she stated that the discipline it provides is a positive force in her life.

#### Theoretical Framework: Family Systems Theory

With Ms. Pruett, I will be utilizing Murray Bowman's Family Systems Theory to evaluate her case. Family Systems Theory is a theory "that suggests that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as part of their family, as the family is an emotional unit" (para. 2, "Family Systems Theory," n.d.). There are eight concepts to this theory, and these concepts include: triangles (the smallest stable relationship system), differentiation of self (individuals and their susceptibility to be dependent on others for acceptance and approval), nuclear family emotional system (the relationship patterns that define where problems may develop in a family), family projection process (the transference of emotional issues from parent to child), multi-generational transmission process (the transmission of slight differences in the levels of differentiation between a parent and their children), emotional cut-off (reducing or disallowing emotional contact), sibling position, and societal emotional process (the emotional system that impacts behavior in society, sometimes promoting healthy and unhealthy periods) (para. 2, "Family Systems Theory," n.d.).

As Ms. Pruett lacked a healthy father figure throughout her childhood, the client was a

victim of the absence of the most natural triangle within the family system: the father-mother-child relationship (or the “two-helping-one” triangle). After the client's father abandoned her family, some of the paternal responsibilities shifted to Ms. Pruetts brother, but unfortunately, his untimely death, again, shattered the “two-helping-one” triangle. Ms. Pruetts seeks inappropriate male attention, especially from her boyfriend, and as such, her early sexual behavior may be associated with the lack of a stable father figure, and the absence of this natural triangle, in her early childhood and beyond.

The second concept of the Family Systems theory is the idea of the differentiation of self (para. 5, "Bowen Theory," n.d.). This concept relates to the client in that Ms. Pruetts clearly is dependent on others for acceptance and approval. This, too, is evidenced by the unhealthy relationships she forms with boys and/or men as she tries to earn the male acceptance that she did not receive from her father. Further, the client is still trying to gain acceptance from her currently absent father; she hopes to see him soon and stated in the initial interview that, “He may not be here for me, but I will always be here for him.”

The four basic relationship patterns associated with the concept of the nuclear family emotional system are: marital conflict, dysfunction in one spouse, impairment of one or more children and emotional distance. As a child growing-up under the care of a drug abusive father, at least two of these relationship patterns were unstable. Because of her father's drug use, there was marital conflict and discord in the home. Because the client's parents focused on their marital tension, it is likely that the client suffered from a lack of adequate supervision, attention and nurturing. The other disruption of the nuclear family emotional system clearly evident in the client's history is emotional distance. The client suffered as her father became more distant from his family, eventually moving out of the client's home.

Looking at the forth basic concept of the Family Systems Theory, the family projection

process, it is easy to see where again, the client suffers from the unhealthy repercussions of her parents' emotional dysfunction. Ms. Pruett learned from her parents how to react to certain situations, and for example, just as she watched her father use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate, she has attempted to use the same methods to keep her issues at bay.

Ms. Pruett's familial history is at odds with another concept within the Family Systems Theory, emotional cut-off. The client has been emotionally disconnected from her father for approximately five years and according to Family Systems Theory, runs a higher risk for repeating the same behavior or becoming involved with a man who is emotionally cut-off or unavailable.

The client, Ms. Pruett, is also connected with the last concept in the Family Systems Theory, societal emotional process. Societal emotional process is the idea that the emotional system governs behavior on a societal level. One example of how this works is when parents unconsciously teach their children that taking the easy, short road is better than acting with a long-term view in mind (instant gratification). This idea is displayed in the client's choice to not attend school and engaging in risky behaviors like unprotected sex.

#### Intervention

- To answer the State of Tennessee's inquiry about whether counseling may benefit Ms. Pruett, the answer is 'yes.' The client has several unresolved issues regarding the absence her father and the death of her brother that she may reconcile with appropriate treatment. In addition, a clinician will be beneficial in helping her recognize, work towards and achieve both her long-term and short-term goals.
- Ms. Pruett may greatly benefit from a positive male role model in her life, whether that be a teacher, a counselor, or a relative. The lack of a stable male figure in her life has impacted her negatively, as evidenced by Family Systems Theory.

- Ms. Pruettt should continue to participate in aftercare treatment at Bradford Health Services as part of her long-term drug and alcohol treatment. This treatment should include regular drug screenings to ascertain a drug relapse.
- The client may possibly benefit from a training course on the topic of safe sex and the transmittal of sexually transmitted diseases.
- The client may also benefit from a tutor, perhaps as part of an after-school program, so that she can work towards her educational goals.
- Ms. Pruettt may also benefit from an Anger Management course, as one of her previous issues at school was fighting with other students.

This intervention plan approaches the myriad of issues that Ms. Pruettt faces from several different angles. As evidenced by Family Systems Theory, some (if not most) of the client's issues stem from the lack of proper paternal guidance, the use of drugs in her home, absence of guidelines and boundaries necessary for positive child development, and the lack of a positive male role model. It is also evident that the client is currently working towards bettering herself, so it is important to take advantage of her motivation to work with her on a healthier, happier, and more stable lifestyle. The above intervention plan works to address the many client needs, both past and present, that may be affecting Ms. Pruettt today.

#### Social Work Tasks

As a professional Social Worker, three tasks that must be completed with this client are case management, counseling and advocacy. Ms. Pruettt will require some referral services, so it is important that the Social Work is able to link clients with other agencies and programs that will meet her needs (anger management courses, tutoring programs, etc.). In addition, as part of the intervention plan, Ms. Pruettt will attend regular counseling sessions with a clinician for psychotherapy. Lastly, it is important that the Social Worker is able to advocate for her client's

needs as the client's guardian, the State of Tennessee, may not understand Ms. Pruet's issues, situation or needs.

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