

CASE STUDIES

Case study on mild intellectual disability in a minor with a focus on assessment and intervention strategies

Estudio de caso sobre discapacidad intelectual leve en una menor con enfoque en estrategias de evaluación e intervención

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Abstract This case study provides a comprehensive assessment of “Ana”, a 12-year-old girl diagnosed with mild intellectual disability of prenatal origin, focusing on emotional, cognitive, and behavioral domains. The primary objective was to identify her specific needs and develop tailored intervention strategies to enhance her adaptation within family and school environments. The methodology included semi-structured interviews with her legal guardian and teacher, direct observation in family and educational settings, and psychometric assessments, such as the Raven’s Progressive Matrices and the Dembo Self-Evaluation Scale. The findings revealed that “Ana” displays fluctuating self-esteem and significant emotional dependency on her mother, linked to anxious attachment patterns, which contribute to her low frustration tolerance and reactive aggression. Cognitively, she demonstrates attention deficits and below-average intellectual capacity, although she excels in creative activities like drawing, which may serve as an expressive outlet and bolster emotional resilience. The conclusions emphasize the need for a comprehensive intervention approach, incorporating structured support in both home and school settings, the development of emotional regulation skills, and frustration management techniques. This multidimensional approach promotes better adaptation for “Ana” and lays a foundation for her long-term emotional and social development. **Keywords:** mild intellectual disability, self-esteem, anxious attachment, emotional regulation, psychoeducational intervention.

Resumen Este estudio de caso aborda el análisis integral de “Ana”, una menor de 12 años diagnosticada con discapacidad intelectual leve de origen prenatal, centrandose su evaluación en los aspectos emocionales, cognitivos y comportamentales. El objetivo principal fue identificar las necesidades específicas de la menor y desarrollar estrategias de intervención para mejorar su adaptación en el entorno familiar y escolar. La metodología incluyó entrevistas semiestructuradas con su tutora legal y su maestra, observación directa en contextos familiares y educativos, así como pruebas psicométricas como el Test de Raven y la Escala de Autovaloración Dembo. Los resultados revelaron que “Ana” muestra una autovaloración fluctuante y una dependencia emocional significativa hacia su madre, asociada a patrones de apego ansioso, que influyen en su baja tolerancia a la frustración y respuestas agresivas. En el ámbito cognitivo, presenta atención dispersa y capacidad intelectual por debajo del promedio, pero destaca en actividades creativas, como el dibujo, que pueden ser aprovechadas como canal de expresión y fortalecimiento emocional. Las conclusiones subrayan la importancia de un enfoque de intervención integral que incluya apoyo estructurado en el hogar y la escuela, desarrollo de habilidades de regulación emocional y técnicas de manejo de la frustración. Este enfoque multidimensional promueve una mejor adaptación de “Ana” y sienta las bases para su desarrollo emocional y social. **Palabras clave:** discapacidad intelectual leve, autovaloración, apego ansioso, regulación emocional, intervención psicoeducativa.

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Introduction

Case studies in psychology have proven to be a crucial methodological tool for in-depth analysis of individual phenomena, particularly in the context of developmental conditions such as mild intellectual disability. This methodology enables not only a detailed examination of each patient's specific characteristics and needs but also the design of tailored intervention strategies that address the complexities inherent in each case (Cleland et al., 2021). In the field of clinical and educational psychology, case studies are essential for exploring the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of individuals, providing a holistic perspective that encompasses their development, adaptation, and the influence of their environment on progress and well-being.

Mild intellectual disability is a condition characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, affecting practical, social, and conceptual skills. Although mild, this type of disability can considerably impact children's lives, hindering their ability to integrate into educational and social environments and increasing the likelihood of experiencing emotional regulation issues, low self-esteem, and challenges in forming meaningful social connections (Vicente-Colomina et al., 2020). These difficulties can be significantly heightened when family and educational environments lack the structural and emotional resources necessary to provide adequate support. Recent studies indicate that children with mild intellectual disabilities in socioeconomically vulnerable contexts face a higher risk of behavioral problems and emotional disorders, largely due to a lack of structure and support in their immediate surroundings (Valencia & Casadiego, 2016).

The case study focuses on "Ana," a 12-year-old diagnosed with mild intellectual disability of prenatal origin, who faces a range of barriers within her family and school environments that impact her emotional well-being and social and academic adjustment. This diagnosis brings specific challenges in learning, socialization difficulties, and issues with emotional regulation. In Ana's case, these challenges are intensified by a family environment marked by a lack of stability, emotional support, and structure, which increases the risk factors associated with her development. Intervention in cases like Ana's requires a thorough evaluation of her cognitive abilities, social adaptation, and the family dynamics that directly influence her growth. Therefore, this study aims to conduct a comprehensive assessment using a combination of psychometric and qualitative techniques to examine key aspects such as Ana's memory, attention, abstract thinking, and affective processes.

The use of standardized psychometric techniques, semi-structured interviews, and direct observation in this analysis not only helps to identify Ana's strengths and areas for improvement in her development but also supports the

design of intervention strategies that promote a more positive and structured family and school environment. Various studies highlight the importance of collaboration between family and educational staff when intervening with minors with intellectual disabilities, as both home and school contexts directly influence the child's behavior and emotional well-being (Flyvbjerg, 2022). Coordinating efforts across these settings, alongside psychoeducational programs for caregivers, is essential for fostering the emotional and academic development of children in vulnerable conditions (Benitez Salcedo, 2022).

In addition to these aspects, the present study seeks to contribute to the understanding of practical interventions within the field of educational and clinical psychology for cases of mild intellectual disability. The recommendations generated from this analysis will aim to reduce the problematic behaviors observed in "Ana," strengthen her family and social relationships, and promote her autonomy and emotional self-regulation skills. These strategies are designed not only to address Ana's immediate needs but also to provide a solid foundation for her long-term development. Implementing a comprehensive intervention approach, which combines consistent family and educational support, is essential to optimize the growth of minors with special needs in highly vulnerable environments and serves as a replicable intervention model for similar cases.

The objective of this research is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics of "Ana," a minor diagnosed with mild intellectual disability, with the goal of designing and implementing intervention strategies that support her adaptation and development within her family and school context.

Through specific psychometric tests and observation techniques, this objective seeks to conduct an in-depth assessment of Ana's cognitive abilities, including memory, attention, and reasoning ability. This analysis will allow us to understand her learning limitations and identify areas in which she demonstrates adequate or even remarkable performance. Recognizing these strengths will be key to developing activities that enhance her self-confidence and provide her with a sense of achievement, while the identified weaknesses will guide the structuring of educational and therapeutic interventions.

Ana's family life and environment have a direct influence on her emotional processes and social behavior. Through interviews, observation, and analysis of her interactions with authority figures and close family members, this objective aims to examine the impact of her family environment and parenting styles on her emotional well-being. This objective also includes the identification of possible risk factors, such as lack of emotional support and an unstable family structure.

re, which may contribute to her maladaptive behaviors and socialization difficulties.

Based on the findings of the cognitive, emotional, and social assessments, interventions will be proposed to support Ana's comprehensive development. Recommendations will include strategies to manage episodes of aggression and frustration, foster healthier social relationships with her peers, and strengthen her emotional self-regulation. In addition, interventions will be developed in collaboration with her school and family environment to enhance her autonomy, such as the assignment of responsibilities at home and school. The goal is to facilitate an adaptive process where Ana feels integrated and supported within her environment, promoting her long-term social and emotional development.

Materials and Methods

This study focuses on the case of "Ana" (pseudonym), a 12-year-old girl diagnosed with mild intellectual disability of prenatal origin. Mild intellectual disability is characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, affecting key skills needed for learning, socialization, and emotional regulation (Vicente-Colomina et al., 2020). These limitations often manifest as difficulties in processing and retaining new information, challenges in social communication, and struggles with adapting to complex or challenging situations in family and school environments. Ana also faces additional risk factors related to a minimally structured family and school context, marked by a lack of consistent routines and sufficient emotional support. Her primary family unit, consisting mainly of her great-grandmother, lacks the resources necessary to meet Ana's special needs, which further complicates her personal adaptation and development.

Furthermore, Ana's school environment does not provide individualized support programs or specialized services to facilitate the academic and social integration of students with intellectual disabilities. Ana's participation in this study is driven by the need to understand her abilities and challenges from a holistic perspective, considering how the interactions between her condition and her environment impact her development. This comprehensive exploration aims to identify not only her limitations but also her strengths, with the goal of designing tailored interventions that promote her emotional and social well-being.

The assessment process was conducted over a two-month period, during which multiple observation and analysis sessions were carried out to address Ana's cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. The case study methodology employed in this research allows for an in-depth exploration of these aspects in a real-world context, providing a personalized

and detailed approach to analyzing her situation (Cleland et al., 2021; Flyvbjerg, 2022). To gain a thorough understanding of her needs and behavior, various techniques were employed, each of which is described below:

Semi-Structured Interviews: Interviews were conducted with Ana, her legal guardian (great-grandmother), and her teacher, designed to explore various aspects of her family, academic, and emotional life. These interviews were conducted in a safe and friendly environment to help participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perceptions. This qualitative approach provided a detailed view of the contextual factors influencing her behavior and emotional development. Furthermore, the semi-structured format allowed for flexible and in-depth data collection, enabling relevant topics to emerge based on the interviewees' responses. The interview with her legal guardian, in particular, offered insights into family dynamics, parenting style, and perceptions of Ana's needs, while the interview with her teacher helped identify pedagogical strategies employed and academic barriers she faces (Bachrach & Arntz, 2021).

- **Direct Observation:** Systematic observation of Ana's behavior was conducted during each evaluation session, both in natural settings (e.g., in the classroom and at home) and in a controlled environment (during individual assessments). This technique is essential for capturing behavioral patterns and analyzing her interactions with authority figures, peers, and family members. Classroom observation allowed for an assessment of her ability to follow instructions, socialize with classmates, and respond to academic tasks, while observation in her home environment revealed her reactions in a less structured setting. This approach also enabled the verification and cross-referencing of information obtained in interviews, providing an objective foundation for understanding her behaviors and skills across different contexts.

- **Psychometric Tests:** Several standardized tests were employed to assess Ana's cognitive and emotional profile, providing an objective analysis of her abilities and challenges. These tests included:

- **Raven's Progressive Matrices:** A nonverbal reasoning test measuring Ana's cognitive ability compared to her age group. This test focused on assessing her perceptual development and abstract reasoning skills, fundamental areas for understanding her level of intellectual functioning and problem-solving ability.

- **Kent Test:** This test provides an estimate of Ana's general intelligence and mental capacity, helping to identify her strengths and limitations in overall cognitive performance. The test is designed to assess memory, logical thinking, and general comprehension—critical elements for identifying her potential areas of strength.

- Dembo Self-Assessment Scale: Used to evaluate Ana's self-perception in areas such as health, intelligence, happiness, and character. This assessment helped to identify strengths and vulnerabilities in her self-image, an essential aspect of her emotional development. Ana's self-assessment also reveals how she perceives her abilities compared to others, which is important for understanding her level of self-esteem and potential emotional responses in situations of stress or frustration (Cortez Paz, 2022).

Each of these techniques provides complementary data on Ana's emotional, social, and cognitive functioning, aligning with recommended approaches in case studies that prioritize a multifaceted analysis of the subject (Asenahabi, 2019). This comprehensive methodological approach also allows the findings to be applicable in similar contexts, providing a solid foundation for guiding more precise and effective interventions. The combination of interviews, direct observation, and psychometric tests enables not only a thorough assessment but also a deeper understanding of how Ana's experiences and context interact with her diagnosis, which is crucial for designing intervention strategies tailored to her specific needs and social environment.

Ethical Considerations

Following ethical guidelines for case studies in clinical psychology, several measures were implemented to protect Ana's emotional well-being and ensure adherence to standards of confidentiality, informed consent, and minimization of emotional impact (Guillemin & Gillam, Sanz et al., 2022). These ethical measures not only protect the participant but also ensure the validity and reliability of the data obtained, as well as uphold the principles of dignity and autonomy for minors involved in clinical and educational research. The following outlines the ethical practices implemented:

Informed consent was obtained from Ana's legal guardian, as well as from her teacher and the school principal, who reviewed and approved the research protocol. This consent included a thorough explanation of the study's objectives, the procedures that would be used, and the potential benefits and risks associated with Ana's participation in the study. Additionally, a verification process was conducted to ensure that all parties fully understood the research terms. This included dialogue sessions to address questions and emphasize Ana and her guardian's right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.

Techniques adapted to Ana's cognitive development level were used to explain, in an accessible and age-appropriate manner, the purpose of her participation and the procedures she would undergo. Care was taken to use accessible language and ensure that Ana understood her participation was voluntary and that she could voice any discomfort at any time.

To protect Ana's confidentiality and anonymity, a pseudonym was used, ensuring that her personal identity was not disclosed at any stage of the research or in the dissemination of results. Additionally, all personal information and assessment results were stored in secure, encrypted environments accessible only to the research team.

Data obtained was kept in a de-identified format throughout the analysis, and any communication or reporting of case results was thoroughly reviewed to prevent the disclosure of information that could indirectly identify Ana or her family. This process is particularly important in case studies involving minors, who are more vulnerable to the exposure of sensitive data, especially in complex emotional situations (Sanz et al., 2022).

All professionals involved in the research signed a confidentiality agreement to ensure that no case information would be discussed with third parties outside the study team.

To ensure Ana's well-being during assessments, all tests and interviews were conducted in a friendly and familiar setting, with the presence and support of trusted figures, such as her guardian or teacher, when necessary. Sessions were scheduled at appropriate intervals, allowing for regular breaks to give Ana time to rest and reduce any potential anxiety related to the process.

Emotional support strategies were employed, such as guided reflection moments and the use of calming activities at the beginning and end of each session. This methodology aimed to establish a trusting and secure environment, allowing "Ana" to feel comfortable and willing to engage. To reduce tension, play therapy techniques and visual aids adapted to her comprehension level were used, facilitating a less intrusive and more emotionally respectful assessment process (Drotar et al., 2009).

In cases where "Ana" showed signs of discomfort or stress, the researchers adapted or postponed assessments, respecting her emotional state. The planning of these interventions included a continuous review of the impact of each technique to ensure that no excessive emotional burden was caused and that the assessments contributed positively to her development.

A protocol was established to intervene if "Ana" experienced adverse emotional reactions during the study. This protocol included the availability of a clinical psychologist to provide immediate support if additional emotional needs arose, ensuring that any negative impact was addressed promptly and appropriately.

Additionally, follow-up sessions were agreed upon with her legal guardian after the assessments to evaluate any changes in "Ana's" emotional state and to take further measures if necessary. These follow-up sessions help identify and mitigate any potential residual effects of the research

process and allow for ongoing assessment of the participant's well-being.

In designing this case study, the goal was not only to meet ethical standards but also to offer a potential long-term benefit for "Ana." Through the assessment process, recommendations and intervention strategies were shared with her guardian and teacher, providing them with useful tools to support "Ana's" development more effectively. This commitment to the participant's benefit reinforces the ethical focus of the research and ensures that "Ana's" participation in the study contributes positively to her long-term well-being.

This ethical approach and the emphasis on long-term benefit are fundamental in research involving minors, particularly in studies focusing on developmental conditions, as it is essential that the findings produce practical improvements in participants' lives rather than merely contributing to data collection (Guillemin & Gillam, 2022). These ethical considerations ensure that the study not only meets the standards of psychological research but also prioritizes "Ana's" emotional and psychological well-being at every stage of the process. This ethical commitment forms a critical foundation for producing findings that are both applicable and respectful of the participant's experiences, generating meaningful insights that not only contribute to academic knowledge but also provide practical improvements in "Ana's" life and her family and school environment.

Results and discussion

In the emotional domain, "Ana" exhibits a notable idealization of her mother, who appears to be a central figure in her self-concept and self-worth. The idealization of parental figures is common among minors experiencing emotional insecurity or a lack of adequate support in their family environment (Rendón Quintero & Rodríguez Gómez, 2021). For "Ana," this idealization is accompanied by unstable self-worth, characterized by feelings of inferiority and, at times, narcissistic traits. This combination may hinder her emotional development, creating an internal conflict between the need for external validation and the low self-esteem she experiences. Literature suggests that minors with fluctuating self-worth often develop reactive defense mechanisms in response to frustration, manifesting aggressive responses as a means of protecting their self-concept (Garofalo et al., 2021). In "Ana's" case, this aggression primarily arises when she perceives threats to her self-worth or reelección from others.

The analysis also suggests that "Ana's" idealization and fluctuations in self-worth are related to patterns of anxious attachment, which are typical in minors raised in unstable family environments (Bowlby, 2020; Siegel & Bryson, 2021).

Anxious attachment is characterized by a constant search for validation and emotional security, which can amplify disproportionate emotional responses when faced with stress or frustration. According to Moretti and Peled (2022), minors with anxious attachment tendencies often display reactive responses such as aggression or emotional instability in an attempt to regulate their emotions in the face of perceived insecurity in their environment. However, these patterns can be modified through appropriate interventions that promote secure attachment and strengthen emotional self-regulation through support and psychoeducation strategies.

In the cognitive domain, "Ana" exhibits distracted attention and below-average intellectual ability, characteristics commonly observed in children with mild intellectual disability. Her difficulty maintaining attention impacts her learning capacity and limits her academic performance, especially in tasks requiring sustained cognitive effort (Chaverri Chaves & León González, 2022). These limitations also affect her adaptability to complex situations, where she shows difficulty understanding her social and academic contexts. However, her long-term memory is adequate, and she demonstrates a notable ability to express her emotions and thoughts through art, particularly drawing and poetry. Research suggests that engaging in creative activities can serve as an alternative channel for emotional expression and as a resource to boost self-esteem in children with cognitive limitations (Chanco Alvear, 2022). Such activities could be a pathway to developing her sense of competence and security.

The inconsistent development of executive functions—such as working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control—may also contribute to "Ana's" challenges in social and academic adaptation (Diamond, 2022). These executive functions are essential for learning, emotional regulation, and adaptability. According to Moffitt et al. (2020), deficits in these areas can exacerbate attention problems, reducing her academic performance and her ability to respond appropriately to environmental demands. Conversely, studies by Gallagher and Blader (2021) suggest that fostering creativity in children with mild intellectual disability can help them develop a sense of competence and self-sufficiency, partially compensating for their cognitive limitations.

"Ana" displays low frustration tolerance, which manifests through physical and verbal aggression toward her peers. This behavior is associated with a reactive response to situations she perceives as threatening or that challenge her self-concept (Clark, 2021). Additionally, in the family setting, "Ana" exhibits episodes of hyperactivity and nighttime wandering, possibly as an expression of the lack of structure and emotional support at home. Child psychology literature emphasizes that children in unstable contexts or without structured family routines are at greater risk of developing maladaptive behaviors (Villavicencio Aguilar et al., 2020).

This low frustration tolerance, along with the socialization difficulties observed in “Ana,” are typical behaviors of children with emotional regulation disorders. Studies by Hinshaw and Sheffler (2021) highlight that these children often experience disproportionate responses to frustrating situations due to a limited capacity to manage stress. The influence of the family environment is crucial in this context, as the lack of clear boundaries and structure can exacerbate maladaptive behaviors such as aggression and hyperactivity (Loeber & Pardini, 2022). These findings underscore the need to establish family routines and develop emotional regulation skills in “Ana” to improve her daily adaptation.

The comprehensive assessment of “Ana” reveals a complex interaction among emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects, significantly influenced by her family and school environment. Her idealization of her mother, combined with unstable self-worth, suggests an emotional dependency that limits her development and fosters disproportionate emotional reactions when she encounters frustration. This pattern of dependency and validation-seeking may be associated with an anxious attachment style, exacerbated by the lack of stability in her family environment. This dependency limits her ability to develop emotional autonomy and contributes to her emotional instability and aggressive responses when her self-worth is challenged. To improve her emotional well-being, “Ana” could benefit from psychoeducational interventions designed to foster secure attachment and strengthen her self-regulation skills.

In the cognitive domain, “Ana” demonstrates limitations in attention and intellectual capacity, consistent with her diagnosis of mild intellectual disability. These deficiencies impact her academic performance and her ability to adapt to social demands, placing her in a vulnerable position within the school context. However, her long-term memory and creative abilities, such as drawing and poetry, represent areas of strength that could be leveraged as resources for emotional expression and self-esteem enhancement. Developing these skills within a supportive emotional environment could serve as a means to improve her self-confidence and emotional regulation.

In the behavioral aspect, her low frustration tolerance and socialization difficulties reveal a need for intervention in emotional regulation skills and the development of social competencies. Her aggressive reactions and hyperactivity at home reflect a lack of effective strategies for managing stress and frustration, a common issue in children raised in low-structure family environments. Implementing a structured routine and developing techniques for self-control and anger management could provide “Ana” with a more secure and predictable environment, promoting better social and emotional adaptation.

The findings underscore the need for a comprehensive intervention approach that addresses not only “Ana’s” emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects but also the contextual factors within her home and school. Children with mild intellectual disability living in unstable family environments face a heightened risk of developing behavioral issues and social adaptation difficulties. Therefore, a multidimensional intervention involving active participation from family, educational staff, and the social environment could optimize outcomes, supporting her socio-emotional and academic development. With consistent and structured support, “Ana” is expected to improve her emotional regulation and develop essential social skills that contribute to her well-being and future adaptation.

Conclusions

This case study of “Ana,” a minor diagnosed with mild intellectual disability, highlights the complexity of the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral factors influencing her development, as well as the crucial role of her family and school context in her daily experiences and adaptation process. Based on the assessments conducted, it is concluded that “Ana” demonstrates a significant emotional dependency on her mother, reflected in an idealization that indicates a continual search for validation and emotional support. This dependency, coupled with fluctuating self-esteem and anxious attachment patterns, contributes to her emotional instability and defensive responses, particularly in situations of frustration. These findings underscore the need for an emotional intervention aimed at fostering secure attachment, helping her build more stable self-worth and a sense of emotional autonomy.

In the cognitive domain, it is confirmed that her limitations in attention and intellectual capacity, consistent with her diagnosis, affect her academic performance and her adaptability within the school setting. However, her strengths in creative activities such as drawing and poetry provide an avenue to enhance her emotional expression and self-esteem. These areas of creative skill present an opportunity to develop a sense of competence, which could serve as a resource for emotional regulation. Encouraging these activities in a supportive environment can contribute to improving her self-confidence and her ability to tackle academic and social challenges.

From a behavioral perspective, low frustration tolerance and difficulties in emotional regulation manifest as aggressive reactions and marked hyperactivity, particularly at home. These behaviors are characteristic of children lacking effective strategies for stress management, especially when living in family environments with limited structure and inconsis-

tent boundaries. The research underscores that establishing family routines and strengthening self-control skills can create a predictable environment that facilitates “Ana’s” social adaptation and interactions.

Overall, the findings of this case study indicate the importance of a comprehensive and multidimensional intervention approach that addresses not only “Ana’s” emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects but also the context in which she develops. The intervention should focus on providing structured support both at home and school and on developing emotional regulation skills that will enable her to face challenges constructively and with greater resilience. Additionally, the active involvement of her family and school environment is essential to foster optimal socio-emotional and academic development.

In conclusion, by providing “Ana” with a consistently supportive and structured environment, along with opportunities for creative expression, it is possible to enhance her social skills, self-confidence, and adaptability—fundamental aspects for her present and future well-being. This comprehensive approach will not only benefit “Ana” in terms of academic adaptation and performance but also lay the foundation for a more solid emotional and social development in the long term.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Author contributions

Miguel Alejandro Bravo García: Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, supervision, validation, visualization, drafting the original manuscript and writing, review, and editing.

Data availability statement

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Statement on the use of AI

The authors acknowledge the use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies to improve the readability and clarity of the article.

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