

Trauma Case Studies

What is trauma?

Case Study 1

Sam grew up in a supportive family. Sam was successful at school and had many friends. Whilst at university Sam experienced a physical assault at a party, which led to a hospital admission. Since then, Sam has become anxious and feels threatened around other people. Sam no longer attends university and is unable to find work. Sam has flashbacks and is constantly vigilant when away from home. Sam has not told anyone about these feelings due to feelings of shame and self-blame.

Sam's parents say Sam has become moody, snappy, and lazy.

Case Study 2

Charley grew up in a violent household where Mum and Dad had violent arguments on a regular basis which sometimes turned physical. Charley had some friends at school but found it hard to concentrate in lessons and so was often called disruptive by teachers. Charley's current relationship is verbally violent with insults and swearing at each other the basis of how they communicate.

Charley has police cautions for fighting and is described by some people as an angry person.

Case study 3

Amira, a 28-year-old Syrian teacher, fled to Ireland with her two children after her husband was killed in a bombing. Their journey to safety took 18 harrowing months before they were granted asylum.

Now in Ireland, Amira struggles with severe anxiety, flashbacks, and hypervigilance. Though she enrolled in a free English course, her participation is inconsistent. Her instructors notice frequent absences, trouble concentrating, and visible discomfort with loud noises or sudden movements. Despite her intelligence, she has made limited progress in learning English.

Amira has not shared her traumatic experiences, and her case worker observes emotional detachment from her children, who are also struggling to adjust to school.

Understanding Trauma Responses and Their Impact on Behaviour

Case study 1

During the assault Sam's survival system took over choosing 'flight' mode and Sam's memory has been updated to include this traumatic event, meaning the world and the people in it are not perceived as being as safe as previously. Due to Sam's shift in perspective, safe events which would have previously been ignored by the survival system, are now perceived as potentially threatening and the primitive brain is on high alert whenever Sam is around crowds of people. The survival system protects Sam by using 'flight mode to keep him away from potentially harmful situations and **'fight'** mode when challenged.

Case Study 2

For Charley growing up in a hostile household was terrifying. Small children need stability, safety, and security. The Aggression in the house made this impossible for Charley. Being afraid so much of the time has meant Charley's survival system is easily triggered and Charley will slip into **'fight'** mode.

Case study 3

Amira's trauma response is deeply rooted in the fear and instability she experienced during her escape. Her survival system is on high alert, making it difficult to feel safe. This manifests in avoidance, detachment, and a constant state of hypervigilance. Amira's experiences are triggering a **flight** response, where her survival system pushes her to escape or withdraw to protect herself.