

Complex Trauma

Sonya, a 42 year old single mother of three presents to her GP. She is well known to the practice having had several hospitalisations for prior suicide attempts in the five years since she has been attending the practice.

Sonya has been on sickness benefits for a long period of time which predates her attendance at the surgery. The pains have been thoroughly investigated but no cause has been found. She is unable to work as a result. Sonya's mother had died a violent death, details unknown when she was five and she had lived with her father, an itinerant worker till she was 10.

At 10 she was placed in a foster home but failed to settle. Several other placements also failed and by 16 she was on the streets working as a prostitute to support her drug habit. She became pregnant to one of her clients at 17 and her other two children were born in quick succession, each to a different father.

Sonya's children had recently come to the attention of the authorities, with one child being the subject of a report of alleged sexual abuse at the hands of Sonya's current live-in boyfriend. The report is currently under investigation.

On presentation Sonya looks older than her years. She avoids eye contact and speaks in monosyllables. She is sporting a black eye and has bruising on her cheek. Her arms are scarred where it appears she has been picking at her skin and she has some deeper scarring on her wrists, possible signs of prior suicide attempts.

She has come asking for something to help her sleep. Sonya is well known in the area as someone who 'doctor shops' seeking anxiolytics and sedatives from each in turn.

Another GP at the practice had previously referred Sonya to a psychiatrist but she attended only once and was lost to follow up.

Did you know...

MHPN has a series of webinars that cover a range of topical mental health issues. Visit www.mhpn.org.au to learn more.

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This is a de-identified vignette.

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