

Case Example: Karen

Discussion Points

Presenting Problem

Karen, a 17-year-old Korean American girl, has been referred by a local free clinic which offers testing for STDs. She has been sexually acting out and apparently abusing alcohol and drugs.

Interpersonal Difficulties

Karen tells the clinician that alcohol and drugs help her forget the intrusive nightmares she has been having. These started when she and her boyfriend became sexually intimate. She and her boyfriend have also been getting into fights. She states that almost every time he tries to get close to her, she becomes agitated and lashes out at him. "It's different when we go to parties, though. When he brings some Ecstasy for us, I can have a good time."

Relevant History and Context

During a home visit, the clinician discovers that Karen and her parents have also been experiencing stress and economic hardship. As first-generation immigrants, the parents work long hours and rely on their children to help them with household chores. "All she does is lie around and watch TV! We can't make her do anything! She causes us so much trouble," they complain. The clinician learns that when Karen was little, a Korean neighbor babysat the girl. The parents found out that the woman's husband had repeatedly abused their daughter. This was distressing for them because it went on for about three years and they felt bad about not being around when Karen was younger. This also caused more hardship for them because they had to find a new babysitter. "But that was a long time ago," they state. They also express concern about her current acting out behaviors: "We wish Karen would be more careful and respect the rules more."

What screening and assessment instruments might be helpful at this juncture to learn more about the causes of Karen's emotional turmoil?



What kind of information must you obtain to discern between mental health and substance abuse/dependence problems?

What has been the likely impact of Karen's earlier trauma exposure on her current behavior and functioning?

In your treatment plan, which issue would you address first: Karen's traumatic stress symptoms, her substance abuse, her risky behaviors, or the needs within the family?

Briefly describe how you would employ specific therapy skills to help Karen overcome her difficulties. (e.g., cognitive restructuring, problem solving, assertiveness training, exposure to the trauma narrative, etc.)