

Case Study: Carys

Carys is a 27-year-old woman living in Llanelli, South Wales. She rents a room in a shared terraced house and is currently juggling a zero-hours contract at a local supermarket with a part-time Health and Social Care course at college. Her boyfriend, Rhys, works shifts in Swansea and usually stays over on weekends. Although she describes the relationship as “supportive,” she also says that both of them are often exhausted and find it difficult to make time for each other.

Carys was referred to her GP after several months of persistent low mood, loss of motivation, and sleep difficulties. She describes waking most mornings with a sense of dread and “a heavy feeling in my chest,” often followed by tears. Her GP recorded a PHQ-9 score of 17, suggesting moderately severe depression, and noted a reduction in energy, appetite, and concentration. Carys reports that she struggles to get out of bed, has lost interest in activities she used to enjoy, and often spends her evenings scrolling on her phone before falling asleep in the early hours. She also admits that she sometimes thinks “it wouldn’t matter if I didn’t wake up,” although she denies any active suicidal intent or plans. She identifies her younger sister, Alys, as an important source of support and says she would reach out to her if these thoughts got worse.

Carys describes herself as someone who has “always tried to do the right thing” and “keeps going no matter what.” Her parents live nearby, and she has been helping her mother, who has rheumatoid arthritis, with shopping and medical appointments. While she values being there for her family, she acknowledges that this has left her little time for herself. Financial pressures have also increased in recent months, with her working hours changing unpredictably and energy costs rising. She explains that this has made her feel “trapped,” as she cannot rely on her wages and often has to turn down social invitations because of money or fatigue.

Until recently, Carys was active in a local Welsh-language choir and ran regularly with friends along the coastal path. Both activities had been important for her sense of belonging and wellbeing, but she gradually stopped attending as her energy and motivation declined. She now feels guilty about letting people down and says that her mother has been “disappointed” that she left the choir, which was seen as a connection to their community and heritage. Her typical day now involves attending college or work, coming home tired, and spending hours on her phone before falling asleep around 2 or 3 a.m. She often wakes early and is unable to get back to sleep.

Carys says she feels “stuck in a cycle.” When she tries to start an assignment, she finds herself thinking, “I’m too thick for this course,” or “I’ll never catch up.” This makes her anxious and ashamed, so she puts off the task, which leads to missed deadlines and more self-criticism. She recognises that avoiding college work brings short-term relief but ultimately makes her feel worse. Her concentration and memory have also declined; she can rarely read more than a page without losing focus. At work, colleagues have noticed she has become quieter and slower to respond.

Carys has experienced mild episodes of low mood before, particularly during her late teens and after a breakup at university, but this is the first time it has lasted this long or affected her daily functioning. She briefly tried antidepressant medication (sertraline) at 21 but stopped because of nausea. She has not had any counselling before and describes herself as “not the

sort who talks about feelings.” Despite this, she expresses curiosity about how therapy might help and says she would like to “find small steps to get out of this rut.”

She attributes her depression to a mix of stress and disappointment: “It feels like I’m doing everything right—working, studying, helping at home—but somehow falling behind.” She adds that she often compares herself to others who seem more confident or financially secure. She experiences guilt for feeling low when “others have it worse.” She has been skipping meals and estimates she has lost about four kilograms since the summer. Her sleep remains poor, and she reports feeling constantly tired.

Carys’s main goals are to finish her college course, rejoin the choir or start running again, and “get a normal sleep routine.” She wants to feel “like myself again—someone who can keep going without everything feeling like climbing a mountain.”