

**Human Behavior Course
2004**

DIAGNOSIS & FORMULATION III
Cultural Aspects of Psychiatry

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION THREE

HUMAN BEHAVIOR COURSE 2004
VIGNETTE 3:1 - "POSTPARTUM PIETY"

Ms. Z is a 30-year-old high-school teacher living in Lagos, Nigeria. She is married and has five children. The birth of her last child was complicated by hemorrhage and sepsis, and she was still hospitalized in the gynecology ward 3 weeks after delivery when her gynecologist requested a psychiatric consultation. Ms. Z was agitated and seemed to be in a daze. She said to the psychiatrist, "I am a sinner. I have to die. My time is past. I cannot be a good Christian again. I need to be reborn. Jesus Christ should help me. He is not helping me." A diagnosis of Postpartum Psychosis was made. An antipsychotic drug, chlorpromazine, was prescribed, and Ms. Z was soon well enough to go home.

Three weeks later, she was readmitted, this time to the psychiatric ward, claiming that she had had a "vision of the spirits" and was wrestling with the spirits. Her relatives reported that at home she had been fasting and "keeping vigil" through the nights and was not sleeping. She had complained to the neighbors that there was a witch in her house. The "witch" turned out to be her mother. Ms. Z's husband, who was studying engineering in Europe, hurriedly returned and took over the running of the household, sending his mother-in-law away and supervising Ms. Z's treatment himself. She improved rapidly on an antidepressant medication, and was discharged in 2 weeks. Her improvement, however, was short-lived. She threw away her medications and began to attend mass whenever one was given, pursuing the priests to ask questions about scriptures. Within a week she was readmitted.

On the ward she accused the psychiatrist of shining powerful torchlight's on her and taking pictures of her, opening her chest, using her as a guinea pig, poisoning her food, and planning to bury her alive. She claimed to receive messages from Mars and Jupiter and announced that there was a riot in town. She clutched her Bible to her breast and accused all the doctors of being "idol worshipers," calling down the wrath of her God on all of them.

After considerable resistance, Ms. Z was finally convinced to accept electroconvulsive treatment, and she became symptom free after six treatments. At this point, she attributed her illness to a difficult childbirth, the absence of her husband, and her unreasonable mother. She saw no further role for the doctors, called for her priest, and began to speak of her illness as a religious experience that was similar to the experiences of religious leaders throughout history. However, her symptoms did not return, and she was discharged after 6 weeks of hospitalization.