

# A CASE STUDY OF AMINA CHANGWE IN COUNSELLING AND THERAPY

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### *Abstract*

This article presents a comprehensive case study of Amina Changwe, a 27-year-old woman facing significant psychological challenges stemming from her tragic childhood experiences, including the loss of her parents and potential abuse. The study employs a counseling framework to explore Amina's complex emotional landscape, focusing on issues of isolation, low self-esteem, and the impact of societal perceptions on her self-worth. Through a detailed examination of the counselor-client relationship, including concepts of transference and counter-transference, the article identifies the root causes of Amina's struggles. It also discusses therapeutic interventions and the importance of specialized counseling to facilitate Amina's healing process. Ultimately, the article emphasizes the significance of empathy, authenticity, and a tailored therapeutic approach in addressing the multifaceted issues faced by individuals in distress.

*Keywords:* Isolation, Self-esteem, Trauma, Counseling, Healing

### *Introduction*

This essay is a case study of Amina Changwe with the following approach: biography of Amina; and thereafter, an inquire on her situation through a counseling-client relationship by transference and counter-transference to disclose her case history. Afterwards, we will review Amina's situation by identifying the root cause to her predicament or problem through deepening the inquiry with clarity, precision and interpretation. Successively, we will apply mixed therapeutic measures to her situation. Subsequently, we will progress to the final goal for our counseling to either a therapy or referral culminating into a termination process.

### *Biography of Amina Changwe*

Amina is a lady aged 27 with a bachelor degree in a social sciences. She is a

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lovely and wonderful person to be with; mostly her intelligence, humor, beauty and sense of care are notable. Amina is a cheerful lady who happens to be the only daughter of her family. Paradoxically, Amina has a very sad and complex background. Her parents were successful and she had an ideal home to grow into, if not for their sudden demise. Amina's father died in a tragic road accident, whereas, her mother died a year and half later as a result of her depression. The depression was due to the loss of her husband that led her into death. This situation resulted into Amina being double orphaned barely at the age of four. Following her tragic circumstances, she moved in with her foster parents who happened to have three children. The foster parent had a good family notwithstanding its limitations. The uncle and aunt were very good and caring. Equally, the stepsisters filled her life with joy and hope. However, we noticed that Amina is usually apprehensive to talk about her stepbrother.

#### *First Stage: The Case History of Amina*

Amina came for counseling because she complained of isolation and lack of self-esteem. Upon attentive listening to her situation, a sad and complex background was revealed.

Further, inquiry into her situation revealed that the source of her isolation, and lack of self-esteem was her perceived critical scrutiny of her appearance by others. For a lady critical scrutiny during self-discovery is problematic enough to be even a root factor for her situation. This is because most men seem to like a feminine smooth and beautiful face on women rather than a hairy one. This in turn puts great pressure on a female person with a hairy face. This realization made it seemingly easier and straightforward to resolve Amina's problem. It was clear as to what should have been the way forward in the counselor's mind. Therefore, the focus shifted from resolving Amina's situation of the intra-psychic dynamics to inter-personal dynamics by seeking expertise. Consequently, cosmetic experts were thought in order to inquire on her situation. It seemed listening to her and suggesting medical experts was a solution sufficient for Amina's situation. Fortunately, she responded to the suggested therapy to the extent of even regaining her self-esteem and confidence.

However, four years later Amina seemed to have regressed from lack of esteem to depression. This happened during her studies abroad whereby, she complained of loneliness and homesickness. She wanted to abandon her post-graduate studies. It all started as one of those usual jokes. This misled

the counselor to focus on encouraging her to talk to someone and continue with her studies. Having realized that she seemed serious the counselor requested her fiancé to pay her a visit as a way of persuading her into completing her studies. Seemingly, sending her fiancé fortified her decision to discontinue her studies. Subsequent to her decision to vacate her studies, Amina also discontinue all communication with the counselor. However, Amina's situation needed more care to the extent of even looking out for her, despite her ceased communication. For Amina the counselor was the last person she wanted to talk to due to the seemingly divergent perspectives arising between them. Nonetheless, returning home worsened her situation, her realization that a lifetime opportunity was slipping off her hands, led her into despair and misery.

Given that pastoral counseling is a process in which a pastoral agent interacts with a pasturant in order to help him/her restore wholesome, well being and a capacity to cope with the problems of life in the light of one's faith: We had to risk into a deeper dialogue with Amina so as to share our self-understanding as an invitation for her to risk into the depth of sharing. Our interface revealed that helplessness and suffering are part of a human condition, to be avoided if possible, but not at the cost of authenticity and integrity. We had to strive into the idea that to be ready to live with some weakness is an essential part of life<sup>1</sup>. Equally, Wright's quote of Carl Rogers specify three qualities to be empathy, care and genuineness<sup>2</sup> as essential in the counsellor-client relationship helped in understanding Amina. Like Gula, we had to respect the responsibility that comes with being a profession<sup>3</sup>. Through empathy we gave Amina attention, in our attentive listening. Equally, genuineness was of necessity for a real expression of what Amina was experiencing. There was need to take a risk and make oneself vulnerable, which required care so as to affirm and confront Amina in her situation.

### *Second Stage: The Root Cause of Amina's Situation*

In the second phase of our counselor-client relationship with Amina, the focus was on deepening our understanding of the root cause of her situation. The background of Amina's life was recalled in a more focus and precise manner. We had had to inquire further in a technical way with probing questions. Our questions were characterized with a phrase like if I hear you correctly on

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. F. Wright, *The Pastoral Nature of the Ministry*, SCM Press Ltd, London 1980, p.57.

<sup>2</sup> Ivi, p.58.

<sup>3</sup> R.M. Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*, Paulist Press, New York 1996, p. 11.

(...) you seem to be saying that (...) or you sound to be (...) is that the case? For example, from your background, your story is so sad and difficult to have gone through such a life. Do you have any difficulties about it? What do you feel about God's fairness or love for you? If I perceived correctly, you are so happy and enthusiastic to speak about your foster parents and stepsisters; however, you seem to withhold information and show some anger about your stepbrother; have I perceive you correctly? Deeper examination with Amina on her situation revealed that she was regressing to the period of losing her parents. Further reflection on Amina's silence as regard to her relationship with the stepbrother, led to curiosity in the counselor. The first instinct on the counselor was why is Amina apprehensive about her stepbrother. Her struggle to ensure that the stepbrother is not talked about begged a conclusion that she must have been abused.

Realizing the state of Amina after leaving her studies the counselor decided to focus on immediate intervention in her situation. It was clear to the counselor that if therapy is delayed for Amina's case she was going to either die or become neurotic as a solution to her situation. The counselor having been in another country the best help to give was a listening ear during long phone calls. The counselor believed in giving a listening ear, would carry her through such a devastating moment. Long calls were entertained between the counselor and client for a period of two months. In some little way the calls helped the client to listen to herself and see some glimpse of hope. When the counselor returned to his home country, which is the same as the client's, he continued with a therapeutic approach. The approach involved the counselor helping the client into reintegration in society in order to overcome the homophobic situation she had found herself into. This was a difficult process because the client's world had been reduced to a tiny circle of the counselor, fiancé and the youngest stepsister. It was a situation where the client felt threatened and insecure from relatives, friends and the crowd. She felt as if each and every person new exactly what was happening in her life. This possibly was as a result of self-conviction of bullying by others to someone whose successful life story was earlier praised. The other difficult in dealing with the client resulted in great threat the counselor seemed to pose on Amina's fiancé. The fiancé to Amina felt as if the counselor had more of Amina's attention. The counselor had to defuse the fiancé's fear and Amina's crisis simultaneously. Long walks with Amina in crowded places and supermarket was an approach used in restoring her to the reality of life.

Moreover, during such walks the counselor begun to suggest to some of the things that she was found of before her life crumbled. Interestingly,

Amina had to be reintroduced into the use of cell phones, social media, shopping and public transport. The most challenging part was to try and introduce Amina to some of her girlfriends. For the sake of not entertaining so much talk about Amina we turn to the phase of quest into Amina's situation. No sooner had the counselor felt Amina was strong enough than he return to a deeper quest on the root cause of her predicament. The counselor decided to reflect deeper with Amina about her childhood. From the reflection Amina begun to realize that she had not finished grieving the tragic loss of her parents. Further, dialogue with Amina led her to a realization that she is traumatized because of being abused. At that stage the counselor decided to shift the discussion so as to find ways of helping Amina to cope and move on with life. The counselor's therapeutic approach is based on Jesus Christ, Aristotle's concept of happiness, Karl Jung on flourishing, Antony DeMello's approaches to pain and suffering as well as some psychotherapy perspective before referral of Amina to an experienced expert.

### *Third Stage: Therapy and Referral Process*

From counseling sessions, the counselor came to realize of Amina's emotional, social and spiritual trauma. At emotional level various feelings and physical reactions were observed. Deeper evaluation of her situation revealed her inner anger, fear and guilty. However, she used some defense mechanisms to disguise such feelings through sublimation and apathy with regard to deep personal issues. Therefore, through countertransference the counselor was able to interpret Amina's situation. The interpretation was aimed to enable Amina get in touch with her deep but concealed feelings. The reality that she lost her parents at a tender age left her emotionally weak and broken. Abuse also injured her gravely to the extent of remaining weak for any emotional and psychological breakdown. Evaluation of the counseling sessions with Amina revealed collapse of her basic source of strength, which is the spiritual energy. This is because her basis of trust and faith was exploited by the untimely death of her parents and abuse from a close relative. It is clear that many questions of blame grew progressively into Amina from childhood. However, she had difficulties to either share with someone or confront God about it for having allowed her parents to die and undergo such a childhood. Likewise, the difficult for Amina was in keeping the traumatic experience of abuse. Moreover, the worst thing for her was to blame herself for not being strong enough. Amina found it difficult to attribute her predicament to historic realities of her life. The counselor had a challenge to ensure that Amina grasp

the source of her multi-ailments. This is because both her mental and health well being was progressive deteriorating.

With the use of the Self of Jesus as a model of pastoral counseling the counselor realized that help must depend on the vulnerability, self-disclosure and some acceptance of helplessness of the pastoral agent. The counselor had to emulate Jesus who emptied himself by accepting to be born and die on the cross as in Philippian<sup>4</sup> (2:6-8). The counselor used Freudian theory to reveal the unconscious reality in Amina. This enabled the counselor to help the client get in touch with her hidden situation of dejection and trauma. There is need to mention that such revelation was communicated to her gradually. It was not easy to help her understand that historical reality have impact in someone's life to the extent of causing psychological and physical harm. At that stage the counselor came to a realization that Amina needed specialized care to be able to work through her trauma. For this reason the counselor suggested an expert for Amina while maintaining availability if she needed any help.

There was need to empower Amina with personal skills for coping with her situation during the transitory period to an expert. The counselor decided to use some ideas advanced from motivational thinkers. One among such a thinker was Antony de Mello on his conjecture about pain and suffering. This perspective was shared to Amina in order to cast a light of hope and strengthen her. De Mello argues that pain is inevitable and there is no one who can resist it, because we do not choose its coming. However, with regard to suffering someone makes a choice to either evolve pain into suffering or not. This means when pain is inflicted on someone, the eyes with which a person interprets that pain has implications on him or her. For example, if my enemy pinches me, pain is inflicted and my interpretation of the act is pessimistic. Thus, there is a great possibility that I will suffer and react; however, if my friend did the same act, pain will be there but because of my optimistic view of the act I will ignore the pain and thrive to maintain integrity of our friendship. Amina was advised to try hard into being optimistic so as to remain resolved in finding meaning even in her discovery.

The source of strength for Amina was Jesus Christ who took the burdensome process of redeeming humanity and remained steadfast on his mission. Jesus' realization that human salvation is important made a gruesome death on the cross to be negligible. Jesus emptied himself by

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pouring himself out so as to put himself totally at the disposal of people<sup>5</sup>, he became poor that he might make many rich<sup>6</sup>. The realization that your life is important; should be your motivation to undergo specialized counseling. This is because specialized counseling will bring about complete healing and development in your life. Frankly speaking I am already proud of you Amina for accepting and making such progress about your situation. This situation has a solution known as time and specialized counseling. In acknowledging my limitations of skills and expertise to holistically help you through this, necessitate me to suggest an expert for you.

The two reasons that lead a counselor to suggest an expert for Amina range from relationship and the nature of the case. Firstly, it was because the counselor and client are related, which made objective counseling quite challenging to the counselor. Secondly, the counselor realized that the case needed a more specialized person for a holistic therapy. It must be mentioned that the client had difficulty in accepting the suggestion of another counselor. However, with persuasion from the less qualified counselor she agreed. Hence, the counselor was able to help Amina name the real factors for her lack of self-esteem and depression. As a matter of fact, by the time the counselor parted ways with the client there was a positive change in her outlook of reality. We can only hope that with time and specialized therapy the client will make a full recovery.

### *Conclusion*

This essay reflected on the dialogue between the counselor and Amina Changwe. The biography of the client's life was given. Subsequently, the client's situation was disclosed through a counselor-client relationship by transference and counter-transference. Hence, various issues arose in Amina's case that need to be resolved. The root cause of her problems were facial hair, unfinished grieving from the loss of her parents and abuse. A basic therapy was given to Amina while waiting for a more specialized counseling. Accordingly, the final goal for counseling was to enable her to get acquainted with her situation and suggestion for a solution through referral to a specialized counselor.

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<sup>5</sup> 1Jn 3:16.

<sup>6</sup> 2Cor 8:9; Eph 1:23; 4:10.