Suicide Contagion Within Pacific Islander and Asian Families in Guam

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Suicide Contagion Research in the U.S. Mainland & Europe

- Studies on suicide contagion within families are limited.
- Suicide contagion studies focus on mass media and peer suicide clusters.
- Exposure to suicidal behaviors are associated with increased suicide risk through:
  - Imitation
  - Modeling
- Studies showing contrary evidence suggest that suicide risk may decrease in response to:
  - Exposure to suicide in the media
  - Exposure to the suicide of a peer
Suicide Contagion in the Micronesian Region

- "Suicide epidemic" in Micronesia
  - Suicides are brief impulsive responses to a temporary rupture in important interpersonal relationships.
  - Suicide has become a familiar and even accepted phenomenon in Micronesia.
  - Suicide has become part of a cultural model for dealing with interpersonal problems.

Suicide Contagion in the Micronesian Region

- Suicides may be reactions to intense grief following the suicide of a friend.
- Two or three suicides sometimes occur within the same family.
- Clusters of suicide attempts often occur after a death by suicide within the same family.
- Cluster phenomenon
  - Multiple suicides occurring at certain times and certain places.
Overview of our Study

- Suicide rates in Guam and Micronesia are among the highest in the world.
- Evidence suggests suicide contagion plays a key role.
- Case studies indicate that suicide contagion is a serious concern.
- Research Project
  - Evaluate the prevalence of suicide contagion in the Micronesian region.
  - Examine the relationship between exposure to suicidal behaviors and subsequent suicidal ideation and attempts.

Suicide Exposure Questionnaire (SEQ)  
Section A

1. Do you know anyone who has **threatened** to commit suicide but never attempted or completed the act?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No (If no, skip to section B on the next page)</th>
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   If yes, how many people who have threatened to commit suicide do you know of?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>&gt;5 (please specify the # of people)</th>
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2. Please fill out the corresponding information below about the people you know who threatened to commit suicide but never attempted or completed the act.  

For your answers, please select from the options listed below each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Recency</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Once (1)</td>
<td>Within the Past Month (PM)</td>
<td>Not Periographically Close (6)</td>
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<td>Mother</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Twice (2)</td>
<td>Within the Past Year (PY)</td>
<td>Somewhat Close (3)</td>
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<td>Brother</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Three Times (3)</td>
<td>6-12 Years Ago (12-18)</td>
<td>Close (5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Four Times (4)</td>
<td>More than 10 Years Ago (&gt;18)</td>
<td>Very Close (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>More Than Five Times (&gt;5)</td>
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Example:  
- Female Friend  
- Distance: Not Periographically Close (6)  
- Recency: Within the Past Year (PY)  
- Frequency: Once (1)
### Suicide Exposure Questionnaire (SEQ)  
**Section B**

1. Do you know anyone who has attempted suicide but never completed the act?  
   - **Yes**  
   - **No** (If no, skip to section C on the next page)  

   If yes, how many people who have attempted suicide do you know of?  
   - ___1___  
   - ___2___  
   - ___3___  
   - ___4___  
   - ___5___  
   - ___6___  
   (please specify the # of people)  

2. Please fill out the corresponding information below about the people you know who attempted suicide but never completed the act.

For your answers, please select from the options listed below each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Recovery</th>
<th>Closestone</th>
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**Example:**  
**Female Friend**  
> 5  
**PY**  
4

### Suicide Exposure Questionnaire (SEQ)  
**Section C**

1. Do you know anyone who has died by suicide?  
   - **Yes**  
   - **No** (If no, skip to section C on the next page)  

   If yes, how many people who have died by suicide do you know of?  
   - ___1___  
   - ___2___  
   - ___3___  
   - ___4___  
   - ___5___  
   - ___6___  
   (please specify the # of people)  

2. Please fill out the corresponding information below about the people you know who died by suicide.

For your answers, please select from the options listed below each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
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<th>Recovery</th>
<th>Closestone</th>
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**Example:**  
**Female Friend**  
> 5  
**PY**  
4
### Overview of our Study

- **Phase I**
  - Suicidal behaviors among Pacific Islander and Asian college students in Guam.

- **Phase II**
  - Suicide exposure among Pacific Islander and Asian college students in Guam.

- **Phase III**
  - Suicide contagion among Pacific Islander and Asian college students in Guam.
Participants

- Participants: 1,046 University of Guam students
- Age Range: 17 – 62
- Mean Age: 23
- 85% between 17 and 27

Gender

- Male: 34.7%
- Female: 65.1%
- Transgender: 0.2%
Ethnicity

- Other Asian: 4.2%
- Part Other Asian: 1.1%
- Caucasian/Part Caucasian: 4.4%
- Chamorro: 31.2%
- Part Chamorro: 13.0%
- Filipino: 36.1%
- Other Micronesian: 1.0%
- Other Micronesian: 3.8%

Education Level

- Senior: 15.2%
- Grad: 1.9%
- Other: 1.7%
- Freshman: 36.1%
- Junior: 19.4%
- Sophomore: 25.6%
Course Load

- Part-time 13.6%
- Full-time 86.4%

Results: Suicidal Behaviors

- 55.6% (n = 582) had thought about or attempted suicide at least once in the past.
- 23.3% (n = 244) endorsed the statement "it was just a passing thought."
- 15.6% (n = 163) endorsed "I briefly considered it, but not seriously."
- 8.2% (n = 86) endorsed "I thought about it and was somewhat serious."
- 2.6% (n = 27) endorsed "I had a plan for killing myself and seriously considered it."
- 4.1% (n = 43) endorsed "I attempted to kill myself, but I do not think I really wanted to die."
- 1.8% (n = 19) endorsed "I attempted to kill myself, and really hoped to die."
Suicidal Behaviors in the Past Year

(n = 155)

(n = 55)

Lifetime Suicidal Behaviors

(n = 155)

(n = 67)
Rate Comparisons: U.S. vs. Guam

- Suicidal behaviors among college students in four U.S. universities:
  - 24% had thought about suicide.
  - 9% had made a suicide threat.
  - 5% had attempted suicide.

- Suicidal behaviors among Guam college students:
  - 30% had thought about suicide.
  - 16% had made a suicide threat.
  - 6% had attempted suicide.
Rate Comparisons by Gender

- Women on our campus had higher rates of suicidal behaviors than men.
- Young men in Guam are at higher risk for completed suicides.

Rate Comparisons by Ethnicity

- Asians had slightly higher rates of suicidal behaviors than Micronesians.
- Micronesians in Guam have higher rates of suicide completions.
Discussion:
Exposure to Suicidal Behaviors

- Primarily interested in understanding the impact of exposure to suicidal behaviors within the family.
- Does exposure to suicidal behavior in the family (including threats, attempts, and completed suicides) make someone more likely to think about or attempt suicide themselves?
- Does exposure to suicidal behavior outside the family make someone more likely to think about or attempt suicide?
- Does the frequency of a person’s exposure to suicidal behaviors within or outside the family have an impact?
- Does it matter how recent the suicidal behavior they were exposed to occurred?
- Does their perceived closeness to the person who engaged in suicidal behavior play a role?
- If the person is the same gender as the individual who engaged in suicidal behavior, does that make them more likely to model their behavior?

Implications:
Services Addressing Suicide Contagion

- Measuring “suicide exposure within the family” is a critical step towards identifying at-risk students.
- Students with high exposure to suicidal behaviors in the family can be offered targeted support services, designed to teach alternative skills for coping with stressful situations.
- Postvention programs should be considered following the suicide of a student’s family member or other close contact.
- Conducting postvention sessions with a student’s family is an ideal way to provide long-term support for the student.
- Postvention sessions can be conducted with extended families.
- Postvention sessions may be conducted immediately following a suicide within the family or years later.
- Postvention sessions should focus on de-romanticizing the suicide and helping children to identify healthier role models within the family.
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If you would like a copy of this presentation, please contact us at:

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