AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Vince Bernard Queja Manibusan for the Master of Science in Clinical Psychology presented November 21, 2011.

Title: Exploring Low Suicide Rates through the Wisdom of Chamoru Elders

Approved: _____
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On the island of Guahan, suicide rates are high for young Chamorus between the ages of 10 and 30 years old, and are similar to the suicide rates found in the U.S. for roughly the same age group. However, when suicide rates for Chamoru *manåmko'* or elders (65 years and older) on Guahan are compared with the suicide rates for the average elderly American, a striking disparity presents itself. Suicide rates show that elderly Americans are at very high risk for suicide while in the Chamoru *manåmko'* population, suicide occurrence is almost non-existent. This study endeavored to explore and understand the possible factors that may be protecting the Chamoru *manåmko'* living on Guahan from suicide.

Qualitative methodology emphasizing grounded theory served as the main theoretical approach for this study. Using semi-structured in-depth interviews that focused on seven key areas in the lives of Chamoru elders, this study was able to identify important sources of strength that can be found in Chamoru cultural values, religious commitments, and social support networks that work together and contribute to the low suicide rates found among the Chamoru *manåmko'* of Guahan. The important findings and theoretical implications will be discussed further in this study.

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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EXPLORING LOW SUICIDE RATES THROUGH
THE WISDOM OF CHAMORU ELDERS

BY

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I give thanks and praises to the Almighty God, creator of everything that was, is, and forever will be. I have felt your strength and have seen your many blessings. I am eternally thankful and humbled for this gift of life.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a serious public health problem that appears to be pervasive in all

societies. What makes suicide such a tragic and compelling problem is that it is an

epidemic that affects all people regardless of political identity, cultural practices,

religious beliefs, race, economic power, and geography. Therefore, it is critical that

research be devoted to understanding this serious world health problem (WHO, 2001).

Research devoted to the study of suicide has been conducted extensively worldwide,

especially among more affluent nations such as the U.S., where much research focuses on

understanding this complex phenomenon. The American Association of Suicidology in

2007 reported a U.S. annual suicide rate of 11.5 per 100,000 individuals. It is most

unfortunate that the current research available pertaining to the investigation of the

suicide problem in Guahan (Guam), and most especially in the context of its indigenous

population known as the Chamorus is still in its infancy. According to the Guam Census

(2000), the island had an estimated total population of 154,805. A study released by

Guahan's Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (DMHSA), reported a

suicide rate of 15 per 100,000 in 2007 (DMHSA, 2009). These rates demonstrate that

there is a suicide problem that needs to be examined on Guahan.

Although the overall suicide rate among the Guahan population appears roughly

comparable to the U.S. suicide rate, the age-related trends are remarkably dissimilar. In

the U.S., the highest rates of suicide appear among the elderly, while in Guahan the

suicide rate is notably low among Chamoru elders (these differences will be explained in

some detail throughout this section). The purpose of this research was to explore and

understand the dissimilarity in age-related trends found on Guahan within the context of

Chamoru culture. In particular, this study focused its attention on the experiences of the

Chamoru *manåmko'* (elders) population who appear to be resistant to the suicide problem

on Guahan despite the rates being alarmingly high for younger age groups.

Literature Review: Suicide Rates, Facts, & Population Demographics

The U.S. and suicide

In the U.S., according to information published in 2007 by the American

Association of Suicidology (AAS), suicide is the eleventh leading cause of death among

Americans. In 2007, Americans suffered 34,598 suicide deaths, which translated into

roughly 94.8 suicides a day or approximately 1 suicide every 15.2 minutes. Suicide rates

have been ranging between 10.7 and 12.4 per 100,000 since the 1990s. Consistent with

worldwide trends, suicide is completed by males more than females but females attempt

suicide more often than males. U.S. data shows that males complete suicide at a rate of

3.6 times more often than females; however, females attempt suicide three times as often

as their male counterparts. Interestingly, there are no official national statistics on suicide

attempts, which can be assumed to be attributed to underreporting and the great difficulty

in obtaining such information. However, it is generally agreed upon that in the U.S., for

every completed suicide there are an estimated twenty-five suicide attempts (AAS, 2007).

The difficulties with gathering accurate data on suicide attempts demonstrate the

problematic nature of studying the enigma of suicide. Likewise, the methodology used in

classifying deaths as suicide is also flawed. It is important to be aware that current

methods used to determine if a death was due to natural causes, an accident, or suicide

yield inconsistent findings. The problem with suicide is that some psychological

inference about the victim's state of mind and intentionality needs to be done in order to

make an accurate determination of suicide. However, conducting a psychological evaluation on a person who is no longer living is impossible. But researchers are taking strides to fine tune methodologies and are bringing more attention to this major flaw. Brown, Bongar, and Cleary (2004) discussed how the reality of indirect self-destructive behaviors (ISDB) used among older adults residing in nursing homes obscure the identification of suicide risk factors. But researchers are beginning to categorize and identify ISDBs, and according Brown et al. (2004), 56 ISDBs have been identified, which include behaviors such as deliberate medication mismanagement and noncompliance or refusing to eat or drink. Continual awareness of ISDBs and the flaws in determining cause of death should guide quality research.

Among young Americans from the ages of fifteen to twenty-four, suicide is the third leading cause of death for this age group after accidents and homicides. In this age group, there is an estimated 1 suicide for every 100 to 200 attempts. For all age groups in the U.S., firearms are the most commonly used method for all completed suicides, with males using this method more than females. The tendency for males to use more lethal methods to some extent explains why the data show that males complete suicide more often than females. In the case of all American females, poisoning is the most common method of suicide and has surpassed death by firearms amongst the female population since 2001. Among ethnic groups, the most recent statistics show that Caucasian Americans experience a higher completed suicide rate of (12.9 per 100,000) than African Americans (4.9 per 100,000) (AAS, 2007).

Globally, research shows that suicide rates increase as age increases (Bertolote & Fleischmann, 2002). The AAS reports some interesting findings regarding suicide among the elderly segment of the population.

The U.S. elderly population, which makes up roughly 12.5% of the total population but accounts for almost 15.9% of all completed suicides in the nation. In 2006, the suicide rate for the elderly was reported to be 14.2 per 100,000. In 2006, there were 5,299 reported suicides for those Americans aged sixty-five and older which translates into approximately 14.5 completed suicides each day (AAS, 2007).

Among ethnic groups, elderly Caucasian Americans are at the highest risk for suicide with an approximate yearly rate of 31 suicides per 100,000. Even more alarming, Caucasian American males over the age of eighty-five were at the greatest risk for suicide over all age, sex, and ethnic groups. In 2006, these men suffered a completed suicide rate of 48.4 per 100,000, which was 2.5 times the national rate of 17.8 per 100,000 for men of all ages. Completed suicides among elderly males accounted for 84.6% of all elderly suicides. That makes the suicide rate for elderly males 7.7 times greater than for female suicide rates in late life. Suicide rates for women typically peak in middle adulthood, ages forty-five to forty-nine, but rates usually start declining after the age of sixty (AAS, 2007). In 1987, the U.S. saw the elderly suicide rate reach its peak at 21.8 per 100,000. But since 1987, the suicide rate for the elderly has declined by about 28%. Data indicates this is the biggest decline in elderly suicide rates since the 1930's. It is reported that elderly adults attempt suicide less often than those in younger age groups but the elderly complete suicide at a higher rate. It is estimated that for those over the age of sixty-five, there are four attempted suicides for every one completed suicide (AAS, 2007).

Guahan and suicide

In Pacific Islands, despite the romantic images that the media and Hollywood have painted throughout the years as places of refuge, happiness, peace and relaxation, Islanders too cannot escape the terrible problem of suicide. The island of Guahan is no exception. It is important to keep in mind as the proceeding information is discussed that the total population of Guahan in 2006 was 171,019 (Booth, 2010). Additionally, according to the U.S. Census 2000 the total indigenous Chamoru population of the island was at about 37% of the total population. More importantly, one must recognize the similarities and differences of the suicide trends for both the U.S. and Guahan populations.

In January 2009, the Guahan Department of Mental Health and Substance (DMHSA) released a study titled, *A Profile of Suicide on Guam*. This was an extensive collaborative effort undertaken by several agencies and individuals through the leadership of DMHSA. The study in particular focused its attention on suicide data from the years 2000 to 2007.

Currently, the fifth leading cause of death on the island of Guahan is suicide. From 2000 to 2007, there was an average of 23 completed suicides per year, which approximates to roughly one suicide death occurring every two weeks. During those years, there was an annual completed suicide rate ranging from 9.6 to 18.7 per 100,000 and a mean annual completed suicide rate of 13.8 per 100,000. Completed suicides on Guahan are consistent with current U.S. and worldwide male:female ratios in completed suicides: males on Guahan outnumber females for completed suicides with a ratio of 9:1 (DMHSA, 2009).

Rates of suicides on Guahan were highest among those aged of ten to twenty-nine. From the years 2000 to 2007, 21% of all suicides were completed by those who were aged ten to nineteen, and 38% of completed suicides were among those aged twenty to twenty-nine. During this same time period, those younger than thirty-years old made up roughly 60% of all completed suicides. Youth suicide rates on Guahan have been reported to exceed youth suicide rates among Americans by 400% (Booth, 2010).

Due to underreporting and the challenge of collecting information on this sensitive issue, the estimated number of attempts on the island are believed to outnumber completed suicides roughly 1.5 to 2.5 times. From 2006 to 2007, suicide attempts were reported to be highest among the youth and young adults, while completed suicides ranked highest among those aged twenty to twenty-nine. DHMSA reports that one of the weaknesses of its study, *A Profile of Suicide on Guam*, is that it was unable to provide a more comprehensive and detailed picture of suicide attempts across the span of 2000 to 2007. One of the reasons for this discrepancy has to do with GPD classifying a suicide act that was not immediately fatal as a "suicide attempt" even though the act eventually culminated in a completed suicide (DHMSA, 2009).

Another striking feature of all suicides reported on Guahan for the years 2000 to 2007 is that among the different ethnic groups on the island, Chamorus accounted for 40.3% of all completed suicides during this time, followed by the Chuukese population at 19.3%, then by those who were classified as "other" ethnicity at 13.6%, and among the Filipino community accounting for 11.9% (DHMSA, 2009). While death by firearms was the most common method of completed suicides for the U.S. population, hanging is the predominant method for suicide in Guahan, and males on Guahan use the hanging

method more commonly than females. Whereas poisoning was the most common method among female Americans, females on Guahan most commonly choose to overdose on drugs or resorted to cutting (DMHSA, 2009).

Suicide rates for the elderly of Guahan

The most striking aspect of the suicide phenomenon on Guahan that deserves close attention is the relative absence of suicide among the elderly community. For the purposes of this study, the operational definition of "elderly" or *manåmko'* (the Chamoru word for an elder member in the community) refers to all individuals who are at least sixty-five years or older in age. DMHSA (2009) reported only one completed suicide that year for an elderly person who was 70+ years old. Interestingly, for that same year, there were no recorded suicide attempts for that age group (70+) in the GPD data. Additionally, DMHSA (2009) reported that among all the suicide deaths for 2000 to 2007, only 3% of all suicides fell in the 60-69 year-old age bracket and only 1% for the 70+ age bracket, which yields a rate of 4.5 per 100,000, in contrast to the suicide rate of 14.2 per 100,000 among elderly Americans for 2006 (AAS, 2007). DMHSA indicates that underreporting of suicide attempts and deaths is a reality on Guahan and this did pose an additional weakness for its study. But despite the issue of underreporting, it appears that completed suicides and suicide attempts are virtually unheard of among the *manåmko'* population of Guahan, and this raises some very important questions about the resilient nature of the elderly of Guahan (DMHSA, 2009).

Another inherent weakness of the DMHSA study is that it does not provide statistical data comparing completed suicides or suicide attempts stratified by both age and ethnicity. For example, the AAS (2007) reported that the suicide rate was highest in

the U.S. among Caucasian Americans over the age of eighty-five. Data analysis that

shows the strength of correlations between age and ethnicity would enable the research

community to identify any high risk groups among the different ethnicities and explore

age and ethnicity specific risk factors. Access to this information would enable the

Guahan mental health community to further develop more sound, reliable, and culturally

appropriate prevention and intervention strategies.

<center>Risk Factors for Suicide</center>

Old age has been identified as one of the strongest risk factors for suicide

(Bonnewyn, Shah, & Demyttenenaere, 2009). Despite completed suicide rates declining

in several countries among the elderly population, rates for those older than 65 years still

show that this particular age group is at a greater risk for suicide when compared with

younger age groups (Bonnewyn, Shah, & Demyttenenaere, 2009). Marnin & Duberstein

(2005) noted that the strong relationship between depression and suicide across the life

span. Heo, Murphy, Fontaine, Bruce, & Alexopoulos (2008) reported that a major cause

of distress and suffering that could lead to disabilities in physical, mental, and social

functioning is major depression, which also implicated in more than two-thirds of all

suicides each year. Another study reported that having a mental illness such as a major

depressive episode and multiple physical illnesses increased the risk for completed

suicides, and that risk for suicide completion increased when other factors included

mental disorders such as psychotic disorders, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse

disorders; financial problems; marital status with a greater risk for widowed than

divorced individuals; poor sleep quality; poor social interaction; employment change;

poor religious involvement; functional limitations; family discord; previous suicide

attempts; and cerebrovascular risk factors (Bonnewyn et al., 2009, p. 278). Studies by

Grek (2007) and Marnin and Duberstein (2005) also identified depression and physical

illness as major risk factors for elderly suicides. However, elderly adults who suffer from

terminal illnesses only commit 2% to 4% of suicides (Garand, Mitchell, Dietrick, Hijjawi,

& Pan, 2006). Being male, having poor interpersonal relationships, having access to

lethal methods, experiencing difficulty adjusting to significant life transitions that include

personal losses, are all factors that place the elderly at higher risks for suicide (Garand et

al., 2006). Furthermore, Bonnewyn and collegues (2009) reported that for the elderly

who did not suffer from a psychiatric illness, personality traits, physical illness and recent

bereavement served as stronger factors for completed suicides than sub-syndromal

psychiatric disorders (p. 278).

Pettigrew and Roberts (2008) found that loneliness is a major health problem

affecting the elderly. They reported that among the elderly, loneliness is strongly

correlated with suicide as well as with other health problems such as inadequate diets,

actual and perceived poor-health, depression, personality disorders, and excessive alcohol

use (2008). Other findings were reported by Blazer (2009), who found that elderly

suicide attempts were more frequent among widow(er)s, those living in isolation, those

with poor perceptions of health, and those experiencing difficult life events as well as

interpersonal and financial problems.

A prior history of suicide attempts also increases the risk of late life suicide

(Garand et al., 2006). The results from a study conducted by Roy, Sarchiapone, & Carli

(2006) appear to support the findings by Garand and colleagues. Roy and associates used

the Conner-Davidson Resilience Scale and discovered that patients who had a history of

suicide attempts obtained significantly lower scores on the resilience scale than those patients who never attempted suicide.

Some researchers focused on studying suicide rates in rural populations since the majority of studies focus on urban populations (Hirsch, 2006). Hirsch reported that despite mixed findings, research and epidemiological data indicate that suicide is a major public health concern in rural areas. Rural suicide rates often surpass suicide rates in urban areas. This trend is attributed to the limited access to suicide treatments because of the geographic, psychological, and socio-cultural isolation of rural areas. Of possible relevance is a cross-sectional national study done by Shah and Chatterjee (2008), which revealed no causal relationship between educational attainment and elderly suicide rates.

Protective Factors from Suicide

In addition to elucidating the main factors that place people and especially the elderly at risk for suicide, it is also important to explore potential protective factors for suicide this information can contribute to the development of effective and culturally competent treatment modalities. Surprisingly, few studies to date have focused on the identification of resiliency factors for suicide. The literature in this area suggests that some protective factors are simply the absence of known risk factors among groups. For example, the absence of mental illness, having less physical illnesses, having close friends or relatives, and experiencing frequent visits by close friends and family members are all factors that help lower risks for suicide (Heisel, 2006).

Emerging research reports the importance of having healthy social support systems. Reduced susceptibility to depression and suicidal ideation has been reported in older adults who have enhanced resources for social support (Vanderhorst & Mclaren,

2005). Research conducted by Kissane & Mclaren (2006) indicated that a greater sense of belonging predicted more reasons to live overall. It has also been suggested that increasing social support and a sense of belonging among farmers would improve their mental health capacities (Mclaren & Challis, 2009).

There have also been a few studies showing how older adults are at lower risk for suicide if they live in nursing homes (Reiss & Tishler, 2008). Much of the current literature examining elderly suicide characteristics have ignored the relationship between suicide and the elderly population who reside in nursing homes. From the few studies that have explored and collected such information, it appears that older adults who live in nursing homes commit suicide at rates lower than their peers who live in the general community. However, it is likely that these studies underestimate the real suicide picture within nursing homes because of methodological problems. Also, by simply focusing on low suicide completion rates in nursing homes researchers can miss other important suicide information such as the number of suicide attempts, levels of suicidal ideation, and the reporting of any indirect self-destructive behaviors such as intentionally avoiding medication or limiting nutrient intake (Reiss & Tishler, 2008).

Many studies are reporting the positive protective effects of religion for suicide. Among African American families, it has been reported that spirituality, rituals, extended family, elder advice, and family cohesion/structure predicted positive outcomes (Utsey, Hook, & Stanard, 2007). A study by Robins and Fiske (2009) found that lower levels of suicidal ideation and attempted suicides were associated with public religious involvement rather than with private religious practices, and they reported that social support positively mediated that association rather than religious beliefs alone, which

emphasizes the rich social supportive environment that religious communities can provide for its members. It has also been found that mental health status was positively associated with religious practices among the elderly (Chen, Cheal, McDonel Herr, Zubritsky, & Levkoff, 2007). In yet another study, it was discovered that the greater moral objections to suicide a religious person possessed and the lower his or her aggression level was could help serve as another barrier from suicide attempts (Dervic, Oquendo, Grunebaum, Ellis, Burke, & Mann, 2004).

Suicide Rates and Research in the Pacific Region of Micronesia

The island of Guahan and the rest of her sister islands in the Mariana Islands chain are part of the western Pacific region known as Micronesia. Micronesia is comprised of thousands of small islands that include the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), The Republic of Palau, The Republic of the Marshall Islands, Guahan (The U.S. Territory of Guam), and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). The Micronesian region is distinct from Melanesia to the south and Polynesia to the east. The Philippines and Indonesia lie to its west. With Guahan being part of the Micronesian culture area, it is necessary to have an understanding of the suicide phenomenon that is also plaguing this region.

The suicide rate in Micronesia is one of the highest rates in the world (Ran, 2007). The two leading researchers who have conducted extensive research on the Micronesian suicide epidemic are Fr. Francis Hezel and Dr. Donald Rubinstein. Through their research on suicide in the islands of Chuuk and in other parts of Micronesia, they have identified a consistent generalizable pattern of suicide in the Micronesian region. Suicides are typically triggered by some anticipated or actual conflict between the

suicidal victim and a parent, or an older relative that may include and older sibling, or sometimes with a spouse (Hezel, 1989). According to Rubinstein (1995), the motivational intent of the victim is to plead with the other person to restore the broken relationship, rather than to inflict pain and revenge on the other. This form of suicide appears as an altruistic type of suicide, a personal sacrifice rather than an escape or a revengeful suicide act that is typically found in most Western cultures (Hezel, 1984).

Suicide in Micronesia is an overwhelmingly male phenomenon with males aged 15-24 as the group at highest risk. Suicide rates in Chuuk have reached up to 206 per 100,000. The most common method of suicide is hanging and more than 80% of the suicides are carried out this way. Many victims slip their heads into a rope until they pass into unconsciousness and death results from anoxia rather than suffocation (Rubinstein, 1995). Initially, Hezel believed that suicides were an impulsive reaction (almost no warning signs) to interpersonal conflict, however, Rubinstein takes the position that warning signs may have been present but were missed and that upon careful analysis, and with the benefit of candid communication from key informants, some suicide cases may reveal months or years of warning signs, especially attempts that happened long ago that were kept secret by the family. Very few suicides have been linked with any formal clinical diagnosis of psychosis or depression (Hezel, 1984).

Suicide in the islands of Chuuk can be classified into 3 categories: *amwunumwun* or anger suicides; shame suicides or "reverse *amwunumwun*"; and jealousy suicides. *Amwunumwun* is a Chuukese word to describe a feeling of anger towards an elder family member who has broken the bonds of the relationship. Shame suicides can be viewed as the opposite of anger suicides in that the victim is the person responsible for the broken

relationship; his motivation is fear or shame. Therefore, he commits suicide to end the

conflict-filled situation and attempt to mend the broken relationship through a

compassionate act of suicide (Hezel, 1984). Jealousy suicides are the rarest type of

suicide motivation in Chuuk and Pohnpei in relation to the rest of Micronesia, especially

the Marshall Islands, where the suicide patterns are unmistakably different from its

neighbors. According to Rubinstein, the predominant suicide pattern in the Marshalls

involves sexual jealousy and male-female conflict. He further explains that researchers

still do not have a sound explanation for why gender conflicts underlie Marshallese

suicides, as opposed to authority conflicts in the rest of Micronesia. Rubinstein also

points out the fact that the Marshalls have a distinctive imbalance between the male-

female ratio of suicide (Rubinstein, 1995). Psychotic suicides can potentially be added as

a fifth category since modernization and increasing western influence is spreading the

ideology of psychological health and diagnosis.

Researchers are endeavoring to identify and understand the main factors causing

the suicide epidemic in Micronesia (Hezel, 1984, 1989; Rubinstein, 1992, 1995). These

researchers point to rapid modernization and globalization that has broken up the

traditional family structure and cohesiveness. Modernization and urbanization is a

convincing argument but research shows that areas that are at high risk for suicide are

those areas on the periphery of urbanized villages (Hezel, 1984). But what is apparent is

that rapid transformation has led to the fragmentation of the extended family network

contributing to high risk for suicide. Traditionally, if a young Chuukese man's requests

for mediation in a familial conflict were denied by his father or an elder relative, the

Chuukese man had the option to and was expected to seek out the help of another elder

family member from his extended family to intercede (Hezel, 1989). In general,

Micronesian cultures whether matrilineal or patrilineal, had in place a maternal uncle or

some other elder relative to confide in and mediate disagreements between a child and

parent. However, with increased Western influence, the traditional Micronesian family

that was firmly rooted among its extended family kin has today become more focused on

the nuclear family unit, and thus, has become more disconnected from its extended

family as it traditionally was. Today, parents find themselves as both nurturer and

disciplinarian, and elder extended family members are reluctant now to exert their

authority over their nieces and nephews or god-children (Hezel, 1989). This added stress

on the parents, and the subsequent stress put on children without the aid of an elder

confidant, seems to play a significant part in the alarming rates of suicide in the

Micronesian region.

<div align="center">Chamoru Culture and Its History with Suicide</div>

Historical review of the incidence of suicide in Chamoru society

It is crucial to investigate the historical incidence of suicide on the island of

Guahan and within the indigenous Chamoru community to be able to understand how the

occurrence of suicide has changed over time in relation to Chamoru culture. In 1565,

Spain claimed Guahan and the Mariana Islands as its possession. Jesuit priests set out to

convert all indigenous Chamorus to Christianity while the Spanish military-government

sought to establish the Marianas as a vital supply port for the Spanish galleons that

traveled between Mexico and the Philippines. Unfortunately, the Chamoru people

suffered tragically under the Spanish rule as a result of foreign European diseases and

warfare between Spain and the Chamorus. Around the year 1668, the Chamoru

population of Guahan was estimated to be about 12,000, and roughly 12,000 to 18,000

for the rest of the Mariana Islands, for a total population ranging from 24,000 to 30,000

Chamorus. The Chamoru population was faced with near extinction at the end of the

Chamoru resistance, which has been referred to as the Spanish-Chamoru wars that

occurred from 1671 to 1698. The aftermath of years of disease and war decimated the

Chamoru population. On Guahan, the population declined to about 2,000 Chamorus, and

throughout the rest of the Marianas, the population was believed to be around 7,000 by

1690 (Rogers, 1995).

During this terrible time for the Chamoru people, Spanish accounts did mention a

few instances of suicide among the Chamorus. Between 1674 and 1683, there were

several documented suicides. In one account, the Spanish Captain Esplana who was in

charge at the time retaliated brutally against those Chamorus who refused to allow the

Captain and his soldiers to have coital relations with their daughters who were attending

the all-female school that was established at that time by the Jesuit priests. Captain

Esplana was reported to have burned down a few houses, killed several Chamoru men,

and applied a choke collar to one Chamoru man. Out of despair, one of the Chamoru

men was reported to have hanged himself. In another account, a clergy member named

Brother Diaz who was residing in the southern village of Merizo on Guahan, apparently

heard the cries of some Chamoru children who said that their mother went into the jungle,

spear in hand, with the intention of hanging herself. Diaz reported that the mother did not

resort to taking her life because he prayed for her. In yet another account on August 19,

1668, it was mentioned that Chamoru fathers do not resort to punishing an unruly son,

lest the son hang himself from a tree to win the argument. A Chamoru father was said to

discipline and restore the relationship with his son by instructing his son to lie on his back on the ground and allow the father to step all over his son's stomach, belly and chest with his feet. However, this was viewed as a caring act for the father and son to restore their relationship with each other (Levesque, 1995). Finally, in an account from sometime between 1679-1683, two priests were reported to be scolding Chamorus during a sermon for choosing to commit suicide by hanging in order to avoid pain instead of choosing to pray to God to relieve their pain (Levesque, 1996).

From these very early accounts, it is not clear if suicide was a common practice among the Chamoru people. It seems that these accounts portray suicide as a desperate attempt to avoid any further suffering at the hands of the oppressive Spanish rulers; however, this is just an assumption. Furthermore, the accuracy of the translation of these documents and the risk of mistranslation resulting from taking words out of historical context creates a real dilemma. But it may be safe to say that suicide was still a rare phenomenon among the Chamoru people, or else Spanish accounts and other European accounts would have mentioned suicide more frequently in their writings.

Penningroth's (1970) historical analysis of suicide on Guahan is based upon old Spanish documents, the annual reports of the U.S. military governors of Guahan, police reports in the Department of Public Safety, death certificates in the Department of Public Health and Social Service Office of Vital Statistics, and autopsy reports in the United States Naval Hospital, located in the island's capital of Hagåtna. Penningroth reported that from June 1949 to February 1970, there were a total of 80 confirmed suicides and 61 confirmed suicide attempts. It is very important to be critical of the reporting inaccuracies of the sources that Penningroth used.   Apparently, many suicides have gone

unreported because of both the strong Roman Catholic religious taboos and Chamoru cultural stigmas, and also because neither the Office of Vital Statistics nor the Naval Hospital routinely listed suicide as a cause of death before 1955. The suicide rates that Penningroth calculated for Guahan included many military and Filipino victims that made up a majority of the reported suicides, which also makes it difficult to determine if suicide was real problem for the Chamoru people during those times (1970).

Penningroth also researched old Spanish documents dating prior to 1856 to understand if suicide was a reported concern during those times. However, the only suicide account that he found during those times was of a Chamoru legend that spoke about two lovers, a Chamoru maiden betrothed to a Spanish soldier who went against her parents' wishes because she was in love with a Chamoru man of a lower caste. To avoid being apart from each other, the two lovers tied their hair together and leapt off a cliff to meet their fate. Hence, a cliffside area on the northwest side of Guahan was named *Puntan Dos Amantes* (Two Lovers Point). After reviewing these early accounts, it is still difficult to determine if suicide was indeed a real problem historically in Chamoru society.

Important Aspects of Chamoru Culture

It is necessary for any study focusing on the suicide problem on Guahan to be to examine the suicide phenomenon within the Chamoru cultural context. By doing so, critical and more accurate questions and answers can be raised for the understanding of suicide within Chamoru society. This section provides first, a brief explanation of the core values of Chamoru culture will be made, secondly, a discussion of religious beliefs

related to suicide; third, an examination of the Chamoru family and its dynamics; and finally, a description of the Chamoru community itself.

Core values

With an understanding of the core values of the Chamoru people, it becomes readily apparent why Chamoru society has organized its religious, family, and community institutions in particular ways. The fundamental value of Chamoru culture is *inafa'maolek*, or interdependence. *Inafa'maolek* can be translated as "making it good for each other" or "getting along" (Cunningham, 1992). Another fitting translation is "the good way." It is this spirit of cooperation that has allowed the Chamoru people to survive and withstand the oppressive onslaught of colonialism, forced indoctrination, and war. Without this spirit of cooperation and working together, Chamoru society could have very well collapsed. Every aspect of Chamoru society, both obvious and hidden, revolves around this concept of cooperation and interdependence. Through *inafa'maolek*, an understanding of the importance and necessity of harmony among the people, with nature, and God is maintained and emphasized.

To live in and maintain harmony requires that respect for God, self, family, community, and nature be given and understood. In Chamoru culture different levels of respect were bestowed onto others based on age and status. The older an individual is, the more respect is due from the younger person. This is most evident in the Chamoru family, as the eldest family members i.e. grandparents or other extended kin of equal or older age (who are revered for their knowledge and wisdom) are treated with the most respect, and then the different levels of respect are given according to age. However, the

only exception to the age paradigm is in regards to marriage. A married couple is expected to be afforded more respect than an individual family member (Cunningham, 1992).

In addition to respect, Chamoru culture values the concept of *chenchule'* to maintain Inafa'maolek. This word can be translated to mean reciprocity. *Chenchule'* is most visible in Chamoru culture during times of celebrations or funerals. Chamorus who attend such events are expected to give *chenchule'* to the family hosting the event as a sign of gratitude, respect, a show of help, and to symbolize a connection to each other. *Chenchule'* could be given in the form of gifts, money, food, and labor. Besides the obvious exchange of materials or labor, *chenchule'* transcends such simple exchanges. The guiding principle with *chenchule'* stems from the understanding that the person who gives to another or helps another person, expects and hopes for the favor to be returned in a way that is equal to the *chenchule'* that was given in the first place. For example, in the situation of someone's home becoming damaged after a major typhoon, a neighbor or a group of neighbors may go to the home and help repair it. Through this interaction, there is an unspoken understanding between the people who are helping and the owner of the damaged home; they are helping because they want to and more importantly because they understand that the same misfortunes may very well happen to them, and it is hoped that the same help be returned in the future (Rogers, 1995).

Religion

Roman Catholicism is the dominant religion on the island of Guahan. In 1823, almost 200 years ago, French explorer and historian Louis Claude de Freycinet noted the religious vigor and devotion of Chamorus to the Catholic Church (Iyechad, 2001).

Despite being forced to adhere to the Catholic faith in earlier centuries, today the great majority of Chamorus are deeply devoted to the Catholic Church. In addition to the weekly attendance at church services on the Sabbath Day (Sunday), the presence of the Catholic Church in the lives of the Chamoru community is visible all year long. The Catholic Church in fact plays an important role in all the major life cycles, from birth, through marriage, and eventually to death.

The birth of a child is always a joyous occasion and time for celebrating. In Chamoru custom, a baby is typically not permitted to be taken outside of the home until the baby was baptized, for fear of sickness and harm caused by evil spirits. Therefore, great attention is focused on the preparations for the day of baptism and the celebration to follow, and all family members are expected to assist. The process of baptism also marks the opportunity for the baby and its family to expand their familial ties. In order for a baby to be baptized into the Catholic faith, the baby's parents must select godparents as additional guardians. These godparents could be close friends of the parents or some distant relatives from either the mother or father's side of the family (Iyechad, 2001).

In the traditional Chamoru practice, a series of formal and informal preparations begin when a marriage is announced. Verbal exchanges begin with the groom asking the parents of the bride for permission to marry their daughter. Negotiations may take place if the bride's parents do not immediately consent to the proposal. Once permission is granted to the groom, dowry exchanges are made and both sides of the couple's families, which include extended kin, all begin discussions for the preparations for the series of ceremonies that will lead right up to the actual wedding day. These complicated exchanges, negotiations, and planning all serve to help bring each set of families closer

together. The blessing of God on the actual wedding day, bestowed by the village priest,

is the culmination of this new union, which not only joins two individuals in matrimony,

but more importantly, establishes a union between two families (Iyechad, 2001).

Death is the most important event that requires the greatest amount of family and

community assistance. Families and friends from throughout the island come together to

help the family mourn and heal. Unlike the other events, death is one occasion that

cannot be planned for. It is customary for each death of a loved one that a nine-day

rosary immediately begin, which then ends with the actual funeral service and burial.

Although death is viewed mostly as a time of great sorrow, in Chamoru society the death

of a loved one is also a time of joy as families and friends are brought together to pray,

eat, share stories, share laughs, and share tears. There is a tremendously visible social

aspect of Chamoru deaths that encompass the entire grieving and ceremonial process

(Iyechad, 2001).

Chamoru family dynamics

Although the previous section focused on the religious aspects of Chamoru

culture, it was clear how intertwined religion and family are within this community.

Chamorus feel a tremendous sense of responsibility to their family that stems from the

nuclear family and branches out to the extended kin on both the mother's and the father's

side. The Chamoru family is structured to include the nuclear family (parents and

children), and the extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.) that are all

equally important contributing members to the family circle and well-being. In this type

of family, all members of the family actively participate in child-rearing duties and

responsibilities. They can perform this function so well because family members usually live together in family compounds.

On Guahan, if you were to visit a person's home in a particular village, it would be very common to see that person's parents, aunts and uncles, and cousins living in close proximity to each other. It is also very common to see family members holding frequent family gatherings at one of their homes (gatherings are commonly held at the residence of the eldest family members). During these gatherings, one could easily see and experience how the children's grandparents, aunts and uncles, parents, older siblings and cousins actively partake in socializing and disciplining the children, which functions to teach the children interdependence and family unity. For example, during the preparation of food, one could see how the children would gather next to an adult relative to give help and to watch and learn how to cook certain foods. In another instances, one could see an aunt or uncle scolding a niece or nephew about a misbehavior, or a child's parent telling his or her oldest child to look after his or her younger siblings or cousins. Because of this close proximity, many grandparents take care of their grandchildren while parents are working or have some other important event to attend. In fact, many adults have their elder parents live with them so they can care for them through old age. The Guam Census (2000) revealed that 16.1 % (6,247 out of 38,769 households) of all households on Guahan consisted of individuals 65-years and older. Aside from their value in helping to raise their grandchildren, elder Chamorus are cared for by their adult children out of the tremendous respect that Chamoru culture affords its *manåmko'*.

Chamoru community

Just as religion and family are deeply intertwined, it can be said that the Chamoru community itself is just as intertwined. Aside from playing an important part in the major life cycles of people, the Church continually perpetuates involvement by adhering to the Calendar of Religious Observances. This calendar marks the various Church events and holy days that occur each year. For example, the island of Guahan has twenty-five villages, and each village has its own church as well as its own patron saint. Throughout the year the church celebrates a fiesta for the feast day of a particular village saint. Preparations for the religious ceremony and the great feasts require a lot of parishioner involvement. It is common for different families to host their own fiesta celebrations that are separate from the church gathering. However, all village residents and in fact all members of the community of Guahan are invited to attend these feasts even though there may be no blood relationship between host and guests (Iyechad, 2001).

Statement of the Problem

There is a growing concern among mental health practitioners (and all sectors that provide services for the elderly) that as the baby-boomer generation (individuals born between 1945 and 1960) reach retirement and old age, the current state of mental health services will not be able to meet the needs of this huge population. Researchers suggest that this cohort might overwhelm the mental health services sector due to their strong healthcare needs and the decreasing stigmatization against seeking psychological treatment (Heisel & Duberstein, 2005).   With data continuing to show strong positive correlations between increases in age and increased risk for suicide, researchers are alarmed about the prospect of the "baby-boomers" reaching old age.

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Interestingly, on Guahan and within the Chamoru community, the trend for increased risk of suicide with age, especially among the Chamoru elder population, does not fit with the current literature on aging Americans. However, there may be a real need to be vigilant and prepared to service the aging generation found here on Guahan and among the Chamoru community. Therefore, it is undeniably vital that this suicide phenomenon be assessed from multiple perspectives and theoretical frameworks. One such perspective is to understand how the Chamoru elders protect themselves (whether they are aware or unaware of doing so) from suicide while elder Americans residing in the U.S. remain at such high risk. Currently there are no studies that explore the psycho-social factors contributing to low suicide rates among elderly Chamorus on Guahan. There is no literature exploring cultural and other psycho-social factors that may protect Chamorus from suicide. As mentioned in an earlier section, there is a dearth of studies protective factors, compared to the body of research devoted to suicide risk factors. It may be that a greater or equal focus on protective factors may improve or encourage the development of better theoretical models and treatment modalities. This study will attempt to provide an in-depth exploration on the possible psycho-social factors that may be protecting the Chamoru *manåmko'* from suicide at their age. Any findings may help the development of culturally competent treatment models and interventions that could help both the youth of Guahan who are at such a high suicide risk, and the aging middle-aged generation who may become at risk in the future. It may also provide new insight into factors that increase risks for suicide for the at-risk groups in the U.S. that were not previously considered or studied.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Qualitative Design

This study used qualitative methods and incorporated grounded theory principles and methodology. A qualitative design was chosen over quantitative measures for several important reasons. Suicide research on Guahan is very limited, and of the few available studies conducted over the past decades, most have focused on reporting quantitative descriptions of suicide trends found on Guahan, often simply comparing suicide trends with other countries and quantifying how primary demographic characteristics, such as age, sex, and ethnicity correlate with suicide. While these correlations provide basic information about the characteristics of suicide in selected populations, there is a serious need for research that identifies and explores the important psycho-social constructs of the Chamoru people of Guahan that may either increase suicide risk or protect against suicide susceptibility. Since this kind of research on Guahan is still in its infancy, it was more appropriate to apply qualitative methods in order to bring about fresh ideas and emerging theories (Kazdin, 2003).

One major advantage of using a qualitative design is that it allows research questions and topics to be understood from the unique perspectives of the indigenous population(s) of interest, which is an effective way to collect cultural information such as values, beliefs, social norms, customs, and opinions (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Another major advantage of qualitative research is due to the flexibility that is built into qualitative design. Qualitative researchers are able to continuously construct, define, redefine, and add new ideas to the research topic, or take entirely new directions during the data collection phase, even late into the data analysis. Furthermore, the researcher is allowed the flexibility to follow ideas as they emerge,

particularly when utilizing grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006). Findings that emerge from qualitative work can often guide researchers in developing testable hypotheses and predictions about the relation among variables for future research (Charmaz, 2006).

Qualitative designs are the most culturally sensitive approaches when working with indigenous populations like the Chamoru *manåmko'* (elders) who participated in this study. It is important to understand that Chamoru culture was traditionally an oral-historical society, therefore, the current *manåmko'* generation is inherently more comfortable with conversation rather than having to sit down and fill out long impersonal question*nai*res. Another important historical fact is that most of the *manåmko'* still alive on Guahan have lived through WWII and its aftermath. Because of this, many of the *manåmko'* never attained a high school education, and many had to quit elementary school to work on their family ranches in order for the family to survive. This is why the use of intensive (in-depth) interviews is the most suitable method for collection of information from this particular population. Intensive interviews allow participants who possess the relevant experiences to explore particular topics in great depth, unlike interviews that are more "directed conversation" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25).

Interpretive qualitative methods require that the researcher give the respect that is rightfully deserved by the participant (Charmaz, 2006). As mentioned in the literature review, the Chamoru *manåmko'* are regarded with great esteem and respect within the Chamoru society. Being born and raised on the island of Guahan, the researcher had a first-hand understanding of the respect due to Chamoru elders. Being a native Chamoru gave the researcher an insider's perspective of the cultural norms and values in Chamoru

culture. The insider perspective is a position that is commonly employed in indigenous psychologies (Kim & Berry, 1993). This helped to ease any participant anxiety that could have arisen when the participants allowed the researcher the privilege of peering into their personal life experiences. Furthermore, because of the sensitivity of this study's topic of suicide and the exchange of sensitive personal experiences such as the death of a loved one, it was more appropriate and respectful to conduct face-to-face interviews with individuals that the researcher had established rapport with, rather than utilizing written questionnaires that are somewhat impersonal.

This study sought to explore and identify some of the positive protective factors that could be contributing to the low suicide rates found in the Chamoru *manåmko'* population of Guahan. It was felt that by applying qualitative methods and grounded theory principles as well as incorporating intensive (in-depth) interviews would be the most effective approaches to elicit and discover key cultural concepts and characteristics in Chamoru culture that might otherwise remain hidden to more formal methods or the use of standardized psychometric instruments or questionnaires.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, a Chamoru person was defined as any individual who had lived on Guahan for over 30 years and who identified his or her cultural background or identity as being Chamoru. Six individuals who have lived on Guahan for over thirty years and identified their ethnic background as Chamoru participated in this study. They consisted of three males and three females, ranging in ages from 71 to 94. Participants were selected through informal contacts such as family and friends. The participants were also chosen because they met the following criteria: 1) had experienced

the death of a loved one such as a spouse or child, or 2) had survived or is surviving a major life-threatening illness or multiple illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, or diabetes. Additionally, inclusion criteria were set broadly to allow diversity on important demographic variables such as the socio-economic status (income, education, profession), living situation (own home, with children, nursing home), marital status, number of children, religion, health, and years residing in Guahan.   Exclusion criteria included hearing or speech impairment, or any mental or physical disability that made it difficult for the elder person to participate in the interview.

Procedure

The in-depth interviews were semi-structured and utilized both closed and open-ended questions in order to access the unique life experiences of each participant. All interviews were conducted in English. Participant 4's eldest daughter, who was of Chamoru decent and fluent in both English and Chamoru, helped as an interpreter and assisted with the entire interview process. All interviews were both audio-recorded and video-recorded using digital equipment.

All of the interviews averaged 120 minutes in length with the exception of participant 4 whose interview took approximately an hour long. She was the eldest of the group (94-years old). However, only one session was needed for each participant to complete the entire interview process. Participants were asked questions regarding the following: 1) their demographic information, 2) their concept of the Chamoru word *mesngon* (to endure), 3) their religious commitment, 4) their coping strategies, 5) their concept of death and dying, 6) their experience and understanding of suicide, 7) their social support networks, and 8) their outlook on life.

To build trust and rapport, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were given a copy of the study's cover letter that provided a summary of the study's objectives, and were also given a copy of the consent form that they signed which repeated the objectives of the study and especially highlighted the participants' rights as volunteers, and their right to confidentiality. All participants were informed that their identities would be kept confidential, and that the responses they provided would also be anonymous. All immediate questions and concerns were answered before the interview started. The participants were advised that they could withdraw from the study at anytime for any reason without consequence. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. All transcriptions were made available to each participant upon request if they wished to review the conversation and make any corrections or suggestions.

Each transcript was analyzed to identify important themes as well as any consistent themes that had emerged from each interview using grounded theory techniques. Themes were then coded and categorized to create the framework for an emerging theoretical position. Previous literature and multiple perspectives were considered in the categorizing of major themes and in the construction of a new theoretical position to make sense of the evidence collected. While one criticism of qualitative research is that it is more subject to interpretative bias, the researcher's position will be made explicit throughout the study to reduce the risk of any bias.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

This research sought to elucidate the low suicide rates found in the Chamoru *manåmko'* (elder) population by focusing on seven key areas in the lives of the six participants: 1) Chamoru concept of *mesngon*, 2) religion, 3) coping strategies, 4)

conceptions of death and dying, 5) suicide, 6) social support, and 7) outlook on life. This chapter presents the descriptions of the participants, followed by the findings and themes that resulted from analyzing each interview. To illustrate these findings, direct quotes and paraphrased statements from the participants will be used. I will begin this section with brief descriptions of the participants, followed by reporting the findings in area 1, the Chamoru concept of *mesngon*.

<center>Descriptions of Participants</center>

Participant 1 was an 88 year-old Chamoru male who was born and raised on Guahan. He was raised as a Roman Catholic. He stated that he lived on Guahan his whole life except for the eight years he was away serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He was a nuclear radiation survivor. He had been one of many U.S. sailors who witnessed and were exposed to the world's first hydrogen bomb explosion conducted by the U.S. military in Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands on March 1, 1954. He had been married to participant 3 for 60 years. Together they had five children, three girls and two boys. He resided in his own home with his wife and youngest son in their family compound. In his lifetime, he underwent a quintuple heart-bypass, battled skin cancer, hypertension, and Type-II diabetes. He was disabled and became completely dependent upon the care of others to move around and provide his bare necessities.

Participant 2 was a 91 year-old Chamoru male who was born on Guahan and lived there his entire life. He was raised a Roman Catholic but had changed his religion to Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) sometime after he was married. He had been married to the same woman for 61 years. Together they had five children, three girls and two boys. He resided in his own home along with his wife and youngest grandson. In his lifetime

he suffered a heart attack that left him physically weakened on one side of his body for about four months. He was fairly independent and able to walk on his own with the assistance of a walker.

Participant 3 was an 80-year old Chamoru female who was born and raised on Guahan. She lived on Guahan her entire 80 years. She was raised a Roman Catholic. She had been the spouse of participant 1 for 60 years. In her lifetime, she suffered at least two heart attacks due to a genetic disorder that left her with thin artery walls in her heart. She was mostly independent with the exception of needing assistance while driving at night.

Participant 4 was the eldest of the Chamoru participants. She was 94 years-old at the time of the interview. She was born and raised in what is now known as the Republic of Palau in Micronesia. She moved to Guahan when she was 30-years old and has lived on Guahan for 64 years. She was raised a Roman Catholic. She was married for 22 years, widowed at the age of 54, and was left to raise her eight children alone (two boys and six girls). She was a home-maker her whole life and had never held a job. Consequently, she received no Social Security payments. She provided for her family through subsistence living. She currently resides in the home of one of her daughters in her family compound. She was fairly dependent on her children for basic necessities but was able to walk on her own with the assistance of a walker. The only major physical problem that she experienced in her life time was a broken hip that happened several years ago.

Participant 5 was a 71 year-old Chamoru female who was born and raised on Guahan. She lived on Guahan her entire 71 years. She was raised in the SDA faith. She

was recently widowed and had been married for almost 51 years. She had three children, two boys and 1 girl. She resided in her own home and lived with her grandson that she raised for seventeen years. She was completely independent at the time of the interview and suffered no disabilities.

Participant 6 was an 83-year old Chamoru male who was born and raised on Guahan. He had lived on Guahan his entire life. He was raised a Roman Catholic. He had been married to the same woman for 63 years. Together they had six children, five boys and one girl. He resided in his own home with his wife, his youngest son, and daughter-in-law in their family compound. He was still fairly independent despite suffering from an aneurism in his stomach in which a stent was surgically implanted.

Area 1: The Chamoru Concept of *Mesngon*

The examination of the Chamoru concept of *mesngon* was an essential area of focus aimed at eliciting unique cultural explanations for the low suicide rates found in the *manåmko'* population. In this section, the interviews were structured to provide three things: 1) to gain an accurate understanding of the concept of *mesngon*, 2) to determine if *mesngon* has an internalized meaning in the life of the participants, and 3) to determine if *mesngon* is still relevant in Chamoru culture.

Definition

Before going further into the details of this study's findings, an understanding of the root meaning of this concept is necessary. With the Chamoru language transitioning from being purely oral into its present written form, two dictionaries have been published for the Chamoru language. The first is the Chamoru-English Dictionary that was published by the University of Hawaii Press in 1975. It defines *mesngon* as an adjective

meaning: "Durable, able to endure, lasting, enduring, not wearing out." In 2009, the

Department of Chamorro Affairs, Division of Research, Publication and Training,

published The Official Chamorro-English Dictionary or Ufisiåt Na Diksionårion

Chamorro-Engles. This current dictionary defines *mesngon* as: "Able to endure, lasting,

patience." It also provides the following phrase to explain its usage: "*Mesngon* si Nanå-

hu. Meaning, my mother is very patient."

Through the examination of the literal definitions of *mesngon*, the participants'

definitions, and the examples that were provided by each participant to explain the

contextual usage of *mesngon* in Chamoru society, the following themes emerged: 1)

toughness, 2) early grooming and role-modeling, and 3) as a compliment reserved only

for persons of merit.

Toughness

This attitude of being tough in Chamoru, most especially during times of great

hardship, will be described through five sub-components: 1) (a) physical toughness and

(b) mental toughness, 2) sacrifice 3) humility, 4) patience, and 5) war.

(A) Physical toughness

According to the participants, to be *mesngon*, a person had to be both physically

and mentally tough. The men in particular placed great emphasis on the physical aspect

of being *mesngon*. However, the women were more likely to describe the physical

stamina of *mesngon* in the context of raising children or being a care-giver to a family

member. When the men were asked to define *mesngon*, their responses hinted at its

physical nature. Participant 1 responded: "*Mesngon* is, actually means you could stand

the pressure. Participant 2 explained: "*Mesngon*, is something that you don't get tire,

you're not lazy, and you're very, uh, aggressive, and you always wanna do things around,

you don't wanna rest, even if I'm tired, you still like continue." Lastly, participant 6

stated: "*Mesngon* means to be strong."

When the men were asked to give examples of being *mesngon*, their stories really

brought out the intense physical aspect of this concept. All of them shared personal

stories of intensive hard work such as farming or working on a ranch. They also spoke of

enduring grueling temperature conditions, and being able to withstand pain. Participant 1

gave the following examples:

> I (at age 12) really work hard in that time because I raise pigs, I raise chickens and
> I scrape twenty coconuts every day. I husk twenty coconuts every day and I was
> just a boy, and I scrape to feed some of the pig and feed some of the chicken, and
> all those things, you know. And then we have six cows and two carabaos and all
> that, to take care of it. So I had to go and take care of that. Pasture them, make
> sure that they have, you know, we tie them all up and make sure to give them
> water to drink, and we tie them where there's a lot of grass and tie them there. So
> I did all that, just imagine that when I was growing up small I very hard, hardly
> give me time to study. I was so tired, sometime when I get home I don't even eat
> my supper I was really put out, so tired that I went back to sleep; I over work
> myself. And that is part of the *mesngon*.

He also explained that *mesngon* could be when a person can work all day out in

the hot sun. Participant 1 went on to explain further:

> Well, when you, like when I said you are assigned to do something that you could
> stand that pressure, especially that kind of work that you are suppose to do, and
> you could work so many hours a day and you, it means, that what men call
> *mesngon*, it means you can stand that pressure of whatever the hardship, of that
> kind of work.

Participant 2 gave the following example of the hard work he did in his father's shop:

> Since I was 9 years old, my father, took me to his shop…because he has that
> business, and that how we survive. And since 9 years old, cut wood for fire work,
> for cooking, and then we carried heavy. You know, and it heavy, you gotta do it.
> You gotta be very…from continue until it come to the where you go. And that is
> *mesngon*.

He also shared the following experience working hard on his family's ranch:

> On a hardship, like we say, we climb the cliff because we live in Anigua and we live near the cliff, well we have a cliff that we walk up to Fort Apugan, and you gotta, it's a long walk up, and sometimes you know, you have to rest when you're climbing the cliff. And that is a hard, and then uh, when uh, because we have a ranch in Fort Apugan, and then we can carry down, and we carry everything on our backs.

Participant 6 gave the following example of his farming responsibilities as a child:

> Actually growing up *nai* see during the Japanese time (WWII) I was only 12 years of age. Yeah, I have to go to the swamp and take care of the carabaos to plow the field. So I get up early in the morning and actually go into the cold water, you know the swamp is…without shirt. That means you're *mesngon* on cold…Yeah, get down to the swamp and you got to go out in the water „cause the carabaos is in the water *nai*. And you have to take the carabao up to plow in Mongmong. Corn. But when we were growing up see there's no K-Mart…shoes, go barefooted. But you know, so you were very…you can use *mesngon* again because actually you're walking on barefooted gravels you know…That's when you're a kid.

Participant 6 went on to tell his most painful childhood experience when he lost

his thumb:

> I was only 6 years of age, maybe younger. See we don't have any transportation to haul the water you know, bull-cart. So we had a 52 gallon barrel of container. We go up to about 3 to 7 miles from home and pump the water into the drum and take it home. But you see the road was a little bumpy you know and I was sitting in the back and actually the bump actually rise up the tank, you know the drum. And my hand went in and smash it. So actually I was, they had to cut it off. So actually I was a *mesngon* person for a young boy *nai*. I was a *mesngon* person for a kid actually that has that pain, pain, very painful. But see when they were removing stitches, in that time they don't have those kind of stitches that actually melted…You have to remove it. That was a very painful feeling. So that was the day that I was *mesngon* you know, „cause I could tackle it.

When the women were asked to give their definitions of *mesngon*, they defined

mesngon not really in terms of physical labor that the men expressed (with the exception

of participant 5) but rather, in their physical stamina, their ability to live with what they

had, and their capacity to raise children and be a care-giver to a family member. For

example, participant 4 gave the following explanation for *mesngon*:

> If you are hurt, you say you aren't and if you fall you down you say that you are
> good. All is *mesngon*; you are *mesngon* no matter what. If you are sick or aren't
> feeling well you still get up and do what you have to.

Participant 3 provided the following definition:

> *Mesngon* means, living with what you have. I think that is the right word for
> *mesngon*. Living with what you have. Whatever my husband can do it's good
> for, you know…So living with what you have. Not being too extravagant. Live
> with what you have…Accepting. Living with what you have and accepting what
> you have, not complaining. Not complaining, not having what you want.
> Because in that way, if you complain to your husband or what, he's not gonna feel
> good. Right? So live with what you have and don't complain. Because there's
> times that you will get it later on. You know, maybe not today but in the future.
> So as you live, maybe you'll get to that point so that you can get what you want
> later on. But for now you gotta be *mesngon*…live with what I have, I accept what
> I have because maybe in the future…

Participant 5 had this to say about *mesngon*:

> It means like uh, you're…you know when, for example, you tell me something
> about uh whether that would make me feel good if you ask me something to do
> and uh I would like to you know, I would say *mesngon* because I tackle the work
> that you ask me to do. When you do something and then you, you cannot tackle it,
> then that's when you feel that, hey, being *mesngon* is, you try hard to do things
> right.

When the women were asked to provide the best examples to describe what it

means to be *mesngon*, they provided examples of showing their physical stamina.

Participant 4 used the following personal examples:

> When I was in the hospital recently (the participant had surgery for a broken hip
> after she fell down) for when I had to get surgery. The doctor said you are a
> patient that is *mesngon* because you are not like sick because you are so strong.

She also gave the following example: "When I was married I wasn't sick and

when I gave birth I wasn't sick." In regards to care-giving, participant 3 gave the

following statement: "They usually, you know, I hear people saying that especially if

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you're taking care of elderly. That's the number one. And believe me, it's hard to take

care of other people." Participant 5 expressed that the difficulties with raising her

grandson for 17 years (she raised him since he was 2 years old and at the time of the

study he was 19 years old) was a good demonstration of *mesngon*. She stated:

> In difficult times you know like, you know I have a grandson that I'm raising up. And there's times when it's hard for me even, „cause you know growing up with a younger, a boy growing up, you have to be, because he's not my real son, so whatever he does I have to you know, learn to tackle it being I should say *mesngon*.

Participant 5 was the only woman who gave a comparable physical example of

being *mesngon* as the men. She stated:

> When we were growing, my dad would plant beans, cucumbers, tomatoes. It's not really a big uh, big of a farm but we survived… We help with the farm. We just pull the grass with our hand and then plant. We pick and we'll sell it. But right now *nai*, everything is being used like machine, tractor. That's why we have big farming now. Not like before. But we survived.

When she was asked if farming was easy work, she responded:

> I should say it's not very easy. Because when we plant and before *nai*, we don't have like I said, pesticide. We don't have those things. And you know when there's uh bugs, we will go there one by one, one tree at a time, and we try to kill those bugs with our own fingers, you know, hand. Especially the tomatoes that has those little bugs, lady bugs and this and there's another kind that when you squeeze it you know, it's kind of a little bit soft. I haven't seen that now because of the pesticide that they're using. But before, that's what we do. And sometime we have like ten rows, and you know, there's like five of us, we all kill those bugs, one by one. And we do that every after school or on weekends, us the children.

(B) Mental toughness

The other aspect of being *mesngon* that the participants implied was the mental

toughness that goes hand-in-hand with being physically tough. When the participants

gave examples of being mentally tough, the need to possess strong will-power and have a

steadfast determination to accomplish things during times of hardships were paramount

traits that people needed to have in order to be considered *mesngon*. Participant 1 gave

several vivid examples that demonstrated his mental toughness. Here are his examples:

> When I was growing up, after school or in the weekend when we have no school,
> I do plow the field and sometime the uh, I using the plow, and uh, when the plow
> start moving, and the plow is as high, is as far as my jaw and the plow hit my jaw
> and knock me down but I never give up, although I'm standing up there so I'm
> *mesngon* see? That's what it is. I never give up. I cry because it did happen to
> me but I got up and continued on with my work because I really want to help the
> family. I want to do my part, and I want show that I can do my part to help the
> family. I was twelve years old. I started doing that. They never thought I could
> do it but I did.

He went on to share:

> The other thing, the bee's would bite me when I was plowing and in the grass
> there's lots of big bee's in there, and they bite me and I start crying but I never
> give up. I went and got the coconut leaves, the dead one and I burn it and I went
> there and burned the bee hive. I'm even with you! That's how I feel. I get even
> with you! I said that to myself. And then I went back and start working again.
> See I challenge, I never give up, that's how I grow up, when I was growing up.

> After participant 1 retired from the U.S. Navy sometime after World War II and

returned to Guahan, he explained that he started his own water delivery business. He

used the money that he saved from his time serving in the navy, and purchased a water

tanker truck. At that time he established a delivery route and gained loyal customers

from the business community in the capital of Hagåtña, as well as from the many people

of the different villages that he delivered water to. Participant 1 told a story about a man

who also started his own water delivery business, and attempted to compete with him and

steal the customers that he had already established. The following is his story:

> Believe it or not, that's when I was grown up already. After when I came home
> from the service, I did that because the commissioner of *Hagåtña* Heights had a
> tanker too. The uh, another guy, cause I started first then they start buying tankers
> too, they start following my way so what happened there, they tried to go into my
> customer. So instead of that they trying to come in, they start coming in at 6
> o'clock in the morning. See? And they delivering water, and they coming into
> my customer. So when I find that out, when they come in at 6 a.m., I come in at

5am. See, when they come in at 6 a.m. I'm already done with that one. They cannot come in there. So the next day, when they come in at 5 a.m., I come in at 4 a.m. You know what I mean? So, he, when he saw me coming with a tanker already unloaded, you know, all the set water, he said „Man, do you ever sleep?' They had a hard time with me „cause I never give up, and that's what you call *mesngon*. So the commissioner knows me from there. Uh, I don't give up, I, if I find out if that guy started cut me in, I'll fix you up! Finally, he go back to normal. He went back to normal. I still come in at 5 o'clock. It's too early for them, *nai*, and they gave up. They cannot stand the pressure that I giving them.

In sum, the examples of accepting and bearing the burden of intense physical exhaustion and pain, especially from farming, requires the possession of will power and determination to push the body beyond its threshold and persevere during the most difficult hardships and the most impossible odds. It became apparent that the many different hardships that were described by the participants, and most especially their willingness to accept them and persevere, signify a personal sacrifice that was bound up within the understanding of *mesngon*.

Sacrifice

The stories that the participants told all described, in their own way, the personal sacrifice that a *mesngon* person makes in regards to contributing to their family, raising children, and providing care to those family members who are in serious need of care. Participant 1 mentioned that he worked so hard at such a young age because he wanted to help his family. When he told his childhood story of farming at the age of twelve, he gave the following explanation for his determination to overcome the hardships of farming at such a young age even when the plow he was using hit his jaw and knocked him down:

> I cry because it did happen to me but I got up and continued on with my work because I really want to help the family. I want to do my part, and I want show that I can do my part to help the family. That's what I feel. That's the reason

why I doing it so we plow the field, then plant the corn. That's what we do in those days.

There is a tremendous sacrifice that is made when raising children or being a care-giver to a sick family member. Participant 5 made the following statements when she described the sacrifices she made in order to raise her grandson for seventeen years:

> I raise him up, like I said, I feed him, I dress him, you know, everything. I support him for his medical because he has a spinal bifida problem. And when he was born he was sent to Hawaii for them to operate him, and uh, I was the one that paid all his bills. And up till now I still because right now he's going to school. He finished already his high school, now he's going to GCC. So I'm think still, I should say *mesngon* because you know, my obligation for him like I said, he's already old enough to go on with his own life but still he doesn't wanna leave me. So I'm still, what I should say I'm, that's *mesngon* because hey, I try to you know, help him out in all his daily life. He wants to stay with me. So I, you know „cause *umbi* it's hard you know, now that I'm growing old, it's hard especially…I don't have a husband to help me out. You know, sometimes if he goes out, and he comes home late that worries me. You know he's, he's you know a good boy now.

She further explained the difficulties of raising a child that was not her own:

> When he was growing up I try when his mom was still alive, I try to you know, to take him over and so that you know, so he can learn how to love a real mom. But because the mom is not that you know, then I have to. So I think that's where *mesngon* is because there's times you know, I need my own, my own privacy, you know my kids are all grown up, and are all up, okay. I wanna you know, I wanna have my own private life now. You know, even when my husband is still alive and he…but like I said, he's my pride and joy now is because he's still living with me. But I had a hard time you know when, you know but then, when growing up. „Cause you know I…it's hard to raise…raise a kid that you know, is not your own. You have to be very careful in everything. Because you can't do as much as what you did to your own. The boundaries that you know you just have to be on a line, a certain area that hey, that's not the way to do. So I think I'm living, I should say that's my *mesngon*, „cause for me *nai*, imagine like I said 17-years is from 2-years old and he's gonna be 19 next week.

Participant 3 highlights the incredible sacrifice that is made as a care-giver in the following story:

> This is what I hear. That they have family, mothers, sisters, brothers that are you know, invalid, and they're bedridden, and you have to take care, and constantly,

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and you know like I say, you have to go to work and then come, or you have children to take care of, and you have to take care of this, and you do it you know, constantly, constantly. I know it's hard for you. And sometimes you cry „cause it's hard but you are doing it „cause you're sorry for them, your mother, your father, your sister, or your brother, your aunt. But constantly sometimes you cry. „Why, why am I doing this?' But you keep doing it, and that's what they say *mesngon*.

Humility: Having a humble heart

A sacrifice made by a person is no easy task to accept, commit to, or endure over long periods of time. For exactly those reasons, the participants explained that a person has to have the heart in order to sacrifice and be *mesngon*. Participant 2 had the following to say:

Well, whenever, my father was brave and *mesngon* type, he's a hard working man, and he taught me how to do it. I never complain of anything, whether it's hard or light. It's always has to, feel that uh, everything we did, it's actually uh, from our heart, and we have to do it, you know.

Participant 3 repeatedly stressed that a person cannot be *mesngon* if the sacrifices made do not come from the heart. She went on to explain that being *mesngon* requires being humble of heart. It is a tremendously humbling experience to remain steadfast and sacrifice oneself for a sick or disabled family member out of love and compassion for that person. She had this to say:

Mesngon. It's coming from your heart. *Mesngon* is always coming from the heart. You cannot be *mesngon* if you're not coming from the heart. It has to have with the heart because you feel for that person. *Mesngon* is coming from the heart. You cannot be *mesngon* if you don't have a heart. You have to have the heart. You have to feel what you're feeling. Yeah, that's *mesngon*. You step down. You're not up there, so you have to step down.

She also added, "You cannot be *mesngon* if you're not humble. That is really the definition that goes together, *mesngon* and humble. That's the key word for *mesngon*. You have to be humble. If you are not humble you cannot be *mesngon*."

Patience

With all of the examples that the participants gave to explain the meaning of *mesngon*, it becomes clear that an incredible amount of patience must be possessed as well. In subsistence living, which was the way of life that the *manåmko'* generation experienced, a person has to be patient when farming. The amount of time it takes to prepare the field for planting, for the harvest to grow, the time it takes to harvest the crops, and the time it takes to prepare a meal from those crops requires an understanding and acceptance of the necessity of having lots of patience. In order to survive a subsistence lifestyle, possessing patience is critical. Furthermore, tremendous patience is essential for raising children and caring for a sick or disabled loved one.

When used in this context, the Chamoru language could be used in the following statements to describe *mesngon*. Participant 1 stated: "*Minesngon este na* boy. This boy could, yeah, like you're being patient." Participant 3 provided other examples:

> The older people, they always say *Na'minesngon-na agao*. Be patient, you know, and it'll come to you. Or *I mesngon ayu apmam*. That means, the patience will, you know, the patience will go along. *Ayu apmam*. *Apmam* means, takes long. *Ayu apmam*: patience goes that long. Yeah, because patience takes that long.

The participants also shared that *mesngon* could be referenced in the context of being patient in marriage. Participant 3 had the following to say:

> Well, in a way, there's so many um, definition for *mesngon* like, patient, you know. When you're talking to a person you, you know, listening and talking to them, being patient. You know listening. There's another word for patient to me, when you are married, you know, living together and uh, it comes to have many children, and it's only one in the family working, and uh, you can't hardly stretch your income, you know, you say that you have five, six children and you stretch your income because that's all you have.

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Participant 6 also described the use of *mesngon* in marriage in the following statement: "*Mesngon* is, it all depends on how you use it because see, because you can use it in married life. *Mesngon* means you stayed with the wife, you know, *mesngon*.

War

As a generation of Chamorus who have experienced firsthand and survived the devastation that occurred during WWII on Guahan, the participants gave testimonial of the necessity for all the Chamorus who were victims of WWII to have been *mesngon* during that time of great fear and suffering. To gain an understanding of this experience, participants were asked if it was appropriate to use *mesngon* to describe the Chamoru people who lived during WWII. Participant 4 gave the following response: "Yes it is because if people come back and they are hurt or not hurt they always have to make sure that they are *mesngon* during tough times. Because you have to be *mesngon* no matter what." Participant 2 shared how the Chamoru people had to be *mesngon* during the aftermath of WWII. He said: "And after World War, everybody after World War, spread out to survive, to look for their life. Uh relative, brother, sister, they all spread out." Participant 6 felt that the Chamorus who were beaten by the Japanese military demonstrated being *mesngon*. He stated: "People, actually people that get beat up *nai* you know uh, whipped you know, and can take that beating you know. You say *mesngon*. He's a very *mesngon* person." A recount of the other participants' stories of WWII will follow.

As a U.S. Navy veteran and the only participant who had served in the U.S. military, participant 1 stated that his WWII experience was an example of being

mesngon. He shared the following experience that was filled with the tremendous stress

of war:

> Well during the war and I was in uh, Pearl Harbor, when they attacked Pearl
> Harbor. Uh, I was in the patrol coming into Pearl Harbor. The USS Hopkins, a
> destroyer. So I, they were bombing already Pearl Harbor when we were coming
> in „cause we were low on fuel. We've been out there on patrol. So we were
> coming in but nobody told us that those Japanese were attacking the Pearl Harbor.
> „Cause nobody knows. It's a surprise. You know. Not even them, they not
> shooting at all until later on. They got the word to shoot back but it's too late
> already. So when I got there, um, we expected liberty, you know. And uh, I got
> out from the ship, and just walked around the dock, you know, where the burning
> ship, already the burning ship that was there in Pearl Harbor. I standing on the
> pier there and just watch them. People are trapped in there, you know, in the
> burning ships. And uh, actually, when you look around the place, there's fire all
> around. Some houses too got burned, and the buildings got burned. So we, uh,
> we were being called backed from the ship that the, everybody, the liberty is
> cancelled. Everybody had to come back. So we had to refuel the ship and uh,
> ammunition, we load, we went back to the place where we would hold
> ammunition, and I carried that 6 shell, it's a shell, you know, every one of us
> carrying one out from a trail in Pearl Harbor, that's where the ammunition is,
> carrying to the ship, until we got all the necessary amount of ammunition, you
> know. And uh, we got all the supplies we need and we were sent out to ride out
> to sea, and when we got out there, we were already getting contact with the
> Japanese out there, Japanese submarine, and we were putting depth charge in
> them. So all day, that's all we do is put in depth charge, you know, like a mine
> you drop, almost all day, on the, when we went out. There must be a lot of those
> Japanese mini-submarine, those small submarines because we bombed a lot of
> them. „Cause they capture about 2 of them inside the harbor, later on, in Pearl
> Harbor. So all day, and the evening. You know, it's time, everything is secured,
> we tried and take a rest. So instead of taking a rest, we start, you know, we were
> given a life-jacket and uh, gas mask, helmet, and everything what you need, the
> gear. So, every half hour, at night, they sound that they contact enemy submarine.
>   So that bell in the ship would ring. So I'm jumping up already, you know.
> Yeah, so I was hanging my, all my jacket on the, next to my bunk. So one guy
> was crying because he can't find his jacket, he can't find his helmet, „cause
> somebody grabbed it and take off. Because I learned from that. So from there, I
> put my life-jacket on, with me, my helmet, I sleep with it. I sleep with
> everything, shoes and everything. So, you know, just in case you get sunk out
> there, at least I got my life-jacket and my clothes on. So I don't have to, looking
> for mine, somebody took it. So I put it on, so every time the sound, every half
> hour, at night, so we only sleep, the minute we start sleeping, you know, taking a
> rest, that thing, the alarm would start. So I had to jump up. By the time the day
> time, we all pulled up. Oh, they look sick because they didn't have enough sleep.
> But, after that we have a little breakfast, and you move around, you forget all

about your sleepiness and all that, you're alright again. Well you're young, you know, you're okay to stand that. But every night it's that way, for the whole year.

Yeah, so there's a hardship on that ship. And that ship would dive down like a submarine „cause it's uh, you know, it's a small ship *nai*, the destroyer, and when it's running fast *nai*, it dive down to the wave. It goes like that (motioning with his hand) and go like that. I was so sea-sick. No kidding. I was heaving all over. I cannot eat. I only eat grapefruit juice and crackers. That's my dinner, and that's my lunch. So I'm so slim. I was very skinny. You know, they called me aboard the ship, „Slim.' They think I'm so tall but I'm not. (Smiles and Laughs) So that's my story in there.

Participant 3 had this to say about her WWII experience when the U.S. military

returned to fight and retake control of Guahan from the Japanese imperialists:

I experienced when the Japanese occupied Guam. I was 11 years old. I remember, and we live in Hagåtña. When the Japanese army moved into Hagåtña, we were told to move out of Hagåtña and go somewhere. So from there, we moved out to Mongmong and stayed there until the U.S. is coming into reoccupy Guam, that's when they told us all moved out and go to Mangengon. So each one of us has to go through that. And we walk, and walk, and walk. And every stop that you get, you know, „cause you cannot just go from here to Manenggon for one whole day, you know, so we stop going maybe in the evening, and my father cut the coconut tree, and just put the tangantångan to make a real big tent…And then in the morning, you have to start moving. So that's what we call *mesngon*. Because can you just imagine walking from here (i.e. Mongmong) to Manenggon…About a day and a half journey…You have to be *mesngon*. There's nothing you can do. Sa' if you complain, you're gonna get it. So you know, *mesngon nai*, all that hardships.

When participant 5 was asked the question of *mesngon* and WWII, she stated:

Yeah, everybody has to. Yes, we have to. That's part of it. Yeah, that time I know, I'm still young but like I said, I still you know, a little did I remember, because I'm still young. So those are the time like you said, I just you know, you have to be *mesngon*, *hunggan magåhet*, you have to be *mesngon* to, trying to survive you know. It's part of you know, life. Thank God that we're still…for us younger generation that's now are old enough, and if we think back of that days, it's yeah, it's really…

She also shared the following WWII experience:

I was like about maybe only five or six because I remember when we were, the only thing I remember is when we were camped in Manenggon. But I was still very small *nai* and I still remember, and there's one incident that I will never forget also when the Japanese you know, you know the mayor's office in

Talo'fo'fo' now, before there, that was their base and there's this guy's son, you know he's a little bit handicap and he was bringing something to give it to the Japanese, and the thing is when the Japanese, I think they saw him and he didn't bow. „Cause *nai* when you see the Japanese, you have to bow. And the poor boy and you know he was carrying uh, I was riding in the carabao cart with my dad and I think, and when he didn't bow because he has something, oh my goodness, when the Japanese came and start kicking him and…oh boy, that one it stays in my mind! That's the only thing that I remember you know, and we stayed in Manenggon, and after that I…when the American came, I was already you know, big.

Early Grooming & Childhood Role-Models

From the many stories shared by the *manåmko'*, it became clear that the Chamoru concept of *mesngon* was passed to them from early parental grooming and parent role-modeling. For example, the participants who shared stories of having to farm at very young ages stated that they learned to work hard and survive from the examples set by their parents. Participant 2 mentioned how his father showed him how to be *mesngon*. He stated:

Well, whenever, my father was brave and *mesngon* type, he's a hard working man, and he taught me how to do it. I never complain of anything, whether it's hard or light. It's always has to, feel that uh, everything we did, it's actually uh, from our heart, and we have to do it, you know, otherwise…Well, since I was nine years old, lot of friends and relative, impressed me for being so brave to help my father when I was just nine years old.

Participant 5 gave the following recollection of the *mesngon* example that her parents set for her and her siblings:

But yes you know, especially like my father, you know. He raise us up. We're 11 in the family, and you know, he doesn't go out and work, only farming. So, hey, that shows that you know, he raise us up by being *mesngon* by trying to make us all survive. Well I, if to me I would say that, hey, because you know we weren't a rich family. Hey, my dad work hard too work on the farm to raise us up just by farming. So whatever we get, whatever you know he supplies for us, we're, you know, we think that, hey, my dad is the only one working and my mom, so it's like we are learning how to be *mesngon* on whatever we have. Well we, you know, we work hard so like you know, we help out my dad by, even though sometimes we don't feel like working but we just have to work and help

out. So we come from a big family, you know, my dad really, you know, and my mom, I think they're the one that really say that are *mesngon* because imagine us growing up and we are all going to school…

Having parental role-models who exemplified the attitude, determination, patience, and sacrifice necessary for survival, left lasting impressions throughout their lives. When the participants were asked if *mesngon* has meaning in their life now, here are some of their responses. Participant 2:

> Yes, it's up to the present time, I'm showing you that even I'm crippled now, I'm disadvantages, disability, it's still, I wanna preserve this (trade). (This trade) was the hardest, heavy, you know, trade in the skill work. And uh, up till now, still doing it.

Participant 3 had this to say: "Oh yeah. I'm always *mesngon*. I'm always *mesngon*. *Mesngon* to anybody, with my family, with my friends or what. *Mesngon*!"

Participant 4 responded: "It is good because it makes me strong when I feel like I can't get up or when I am sick and hurting it makes me say that I can get up and be strong."

Participant 5 stated:

> Yes even right now, like I said, I can say personally because I have a growing boy. I take care of this since he was young. 2 years old. And you know, raising up a child is hard, especially if it's not yours. But he's just like mine, in my mind now because he, like I said, I raise him up since I he was 2-years old. He's gonna be 19 next week.

Lastly, participant 6 had this to share:

> Actually you can say I was *mesngon* „cause I can tolerate you know, the hardship you know, when growing up we just don't, parents don't just give you a car or something like that and build a house, so we just have to be satisfied with what you have. Yeah. So tolerate the good and bad.

A Compliment Reserved Only for Persons of Merit

The participants' reports yielded some conflicting findings regarding the frequency of *mesngon* being spoken during everyday conversations. Some of the

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participants stated that *mesngon* was still a commonly used word. For example,

participant 1 stated: "A lot of people they use that word, common, that's a common word

they use." Participant 5 had this to say about its frequency: "You know, there's times

like, it all depends upon, yeah, on how you know you say it but I think there's you know,

I can always hear *mesngon*." But others felt it was an uncommon word. Participant 2

mentioned:

> Today, well they, in the parties, hardly we discuss the word *mesngon*. Only
> discuss *mesngon* when somebody is do something and he say, well I couldn't do
> it. You know, but mostly we discuss about, you know, how hard you work
> because they felt that because the old days, we have to work to survive. To tell
> you that today, hardly we associate with the word.
> Participant 6 stated: "*Mesngon* is a word that actually, it's not a very common

word used you know. In our culture we don't normally use *mesngon*. It's a word that

actually…rare, you know, usually, hardly use it." The exception to this debate is

participant 4. She stated that at her age (94) she did not hear *mesngon* being used in the

community because she rarely ever leaves her home.

Although these conflicting opinions exist, it could be that the uncommon use of

mesngon in Chamoru conversation is due to the rare emeritus qualities that allow a person

to be recognized as a *mesngon* person. Participant 6 mentioned constantly that *mesngon*

is a "powerful word." To be given such a powerful attribute, a person had to earn it.

Although *mesngon* can be used within various contexts, the action(s) demonstrated had to

be worthy of the compliment. This is why participant 6 went on to say that he felt the

only people that deserve such a compliment are the military personnel. He stated:

> To use *mesngon*. The only way you can use compliment is like the service
> people. *Mesngon* is a service. You know people that are in the service, they stay
> there and get all those, yes and no, you know. So they're *mesngon*. You can say
> that they're *mesngon* in their field.

As was mentioned earlier, being a care-giver for a loved one was a paramount example of deserving the attribute of being *mesngon*. Participant 3 stated:

And they say, when they know that you are taking care of this person, maybe your neighbors or somebody's husband, and they die, they will talk about you. And they say, you know what, „She's a very'…they talk about you, that you are very good to whoever you took, as a caregiver. You are very good as a giver, as one of the family. Not caregiver for people who are getting paid, they are there „cause they are getting paid but for a caregiver that is part of the family, when that person dies, they will say *Ai adai, a minesngon sa ha setbe. Setbe* means, take care, you know of him. And they will talk a lot about you, and I hear people say, *mesngon*. „Cause that's hard work. Okay. So that's part of it.

Mesngon is a powerful word that is not to be taken for granted or used loosely in Chamoru culture. This term is bestowed only on exceptional acts of physical toughness, steadfast willpower and determination, tremendous patience, great personal sacrifice, and an obvious display of heart. The participants in this study exemplify a generation of Chamorus who have witnessed, experienced, and lived the value of being *mesngon* in order to survive the most extreme hardships. The next section will now explore if religion played an important role in the lives of the participants.

Area 2: RELIGION

The objective of this section was to explore the participants' religious involvement and their level of religious devotion.   Of the six participants, 4 were born and raised Roman Catholics, except for participant 2 who was born and raised a Catholic but later converted to Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) after he got married, and participant 5 who was born and raised SDA.

Religious involvement

A commonality that was voiced by the participants was how they used to be more involved with church functions, gatherings, and celebrations when they were younger,

but as they reached old age, their involvement in church gatherings became limited.

Despite the limitations that their age has brought them, many participants found other

ways to stay involved and contribute to their religious community. Participant 1 shared

that he used to go to church on Sundays but since he became disabled and needed

assistance to move around, he stays home and attends mass through his television, which

televises the Sunday morning mass from the local Cathedral Basilica located in the

capital of Hagåtña. He also stated that people come over to his home on Sundays to give

him communion. Participant 3 stated that although she cannot be physically involved

with church celebrations she remains involved by giving monetary donations to the

church. Participant 5 shared that every 3 months the SDA church would be given a

thorough cleaning by its church members. But due to her current physical limitations,

she now pays people to clean the church to fulfill her obligation.

Strong in the Faith: The Devotion of the Chamoru People

Among the 6 participants, a consistent emphasis on a strong personal devotion

and reverence for God was articulated. They shared a steadfast belief and faith that God

is truly merciful because he has granted eternal salvation through the death and

resurrection of his only begotten son. Each of the participants' testimonials resonated

with that recurrent message. When the participants were asked, Why is praying

important to you? The strength of their devotion to God was best understood through the

following responses that the participants provided. Participant 1 shared:

> Well you believe in God, so that means you believe on whatever happens to, like
> uh, Christ is born, the son of God so that, in those days, a lot of people don't
> believe, that's the reason why he got tortured and he died on the cross for us.
> With that, the story of that, I was not born yet on that. But according to the bible
> and all that, and your parents talk about it, and I stick to that religious, that I'm a
> Catholic, and I was born as a Catholic, and being a Catholic is that Christ built

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that church, the first church, it's Catholic church. So that means I stick to that regardless of who came, what came, whatever religious they come in here. I won't change my religion.

Participant 2 stated:

Well you know, if it wasn't God, we won't be living now here on earth. And the reason for that is, of course I believe in God and Jesus Christ, and I know that all my pain, all the incident, I could've been gone but because there's an angel that guiding me, you know, save my life or my illness, or something like that, and that's how we came about.

The importance of praying for receiving comfort and help from God

The participants consistently voiced that during the turbulent times in their lives, they remained steadfast and devoted to God, and they would always turn to him for guidance and comfort during all hardships. Participant 2 had the following to say:

When you're praying and then, you feel that God is watching you, I feel that my heart was very, very light and it feels that God is in my heart. Well, if they knew that I have a problem or that means they pray at home for me, or they pray at the church, and if I knew that I had a problem, I go to church and pray, you know, and uh, when go into the church you have to have the mind that God is with you. See? In your mind. See, „cause lot of people, with my friends or what, that when they get in church God was not in their mind. They're in their mind, they have something in their mind that I can, I don't want to describe but I can what, what they are not, they don't come for the church, they're just maybe there to just accompany his wife, or his daughter, or his friend or something like that. But if you go to church, you have see that you go to church for God. Because when you need something, when you need help, then you go and you ask, you pray to God to help you. And God is always help. That's why he died on the cross, Jesus Christ, died on the cross because we are all sinners, and when you commit a sin and you say please forgive me, Jesus Christ, he will. Because he died for us. He did that ahead of time (laughing).

Participant 3 gave the following response to explain her faith in God and the importance of praying:

Pray, like the priest always says, is very very powerful. People might say I pray pray, pray and I don't… but God don't listen. He's listening to you. God's always listening to you. He's with you all the time I believe that any hardships he's with me. But he carries the cross, so I carry the cross for him too. So when you are in pain, you know, or having any hardships between family, friends just

remember you're not by yourself. Always remember that he's next to you. He's in your footsteps carrying you.

She also shared how prayer helps her receive comfort during times of trouble.

> I feel very comfortable if I'm not…if I'm a little bit stressed out, I'm feeling a little bit uncomfortable, I go to church, for mass. „Cause I feel very at peace at church…When I got pain on my back or what, I said, I think you know, when you go in there you completely, especially during the Eucharist. When he say this is my body and blood, you know. So it really is like, you know when they during the Eucharist when the priest is saying that, looking up at him is just like looking at the last supper. Like a picture of Jesus on his table, that's the way I feel during the Eucharist. As soon as he puts that host up there, the feeling is just like looking at that table of the last supper, when Jesus was saying that but it's not Jesus who says that but the priest who says that. He's taking the place of Jesus. And that's very important for me during the communion, during the Eucharist…It makes me feel just like what Jesus was saying, this is my body and blood. It refreshes your heart…Be humble and ask God to forgive you for all your sins, and make me a better person, for you, not for anybody…I believe that God releases. When you pray I think that God releases you.

Participant 4 gave the following important reasons for praying and having faith in God:

> So that I will not to be sick and I will be strong no matter what time. And when I got married my mom and dad said „That no matter if you are rich or poor don't ever forget God. Always pray in the morning and night.

When she was asked if she felt her faith has helped her in her life, she said:

> Yes it has helped me all the way up to this time because during this time, I am still alive and all my children are strong and they help me with whatever I need. Because if I didn't have any children then I wouldn't have anyone here to help me. There's only one that is gone (her daughter passed away) but the rest of us are together here.

Participant 5 gave the following account:

> Because without you know…prayer hey, remember that everything is from God, and it helps, and believe me it really…praying because there's times when I, I like you know, my boy leaves the place and I have to pray, I said please lord protect him because you know I'm scared when you know out in the street now, nowadays you don't know when something will just happen. So I make sure that I pray, give thanks for being alive. What everything that you know, we're surviving, the lord. If it wasn't for the help of God, the lord, hey, there's nothing we can do. But with the help like I said in times, sometimes when I pray I couldn't find something, I ask the Lord please help me to find what I, you know,

because I couldn't find it and then sure the Lord answers my prayers. And you know, sooner or later I said there it is. You always have to be thankful for the Lord because it was, it's the lord, if it wasn't for the lord, we're not gonna survive or living like this in our daily lives…Even to eat you have to say a prayer and give thanks to the lord that he gives us food.

When she was asked how God has helped her in her life, she responded:

Like I said well you know, raising up the grandson with his help because I always make sure I pray for him that you know that he will be protected from harm and danger. Because I don't know out there when you know he goes out I don't know what's going on. You know if, sometimes his friend will pick him up and I said oh lord, please protect them from you know the street because accident might happen.

She continued:

He has spinal bifida problem. You know he's little bit like, his IQ is a little like two years, that's what the doctor said, two years behind. Yes, and he really helps me. Like I said the Lord has blessed me because I am not that rich and I'm not that poor. But you know, imagine paying his, all his bills, hospital, medical bills. It was only me that pays.

When participant 6 was asked why praying is important, he gave the following statement: "Prayer is good for me. It keep the family together. See up till now, I'm still a long life. I was blessed with that." When he was asked what he prayed for, he said: "Lot of things but he (God) doesn't give you everything. It gives you little more stable you know, making you think better (about) you know, family function and you know, day function, same thing." When he was asked if he felt his faith has helped him in his life he stated:

I would say yes because I actually I'm as I said, still around person you know, cannot ask more than that actually. Have a…get yourself retired. Still have income but you know, satisfied. Every day is, every day is a day for God but he don't fulfill everything *nai*. „Cause you know, you only go Sundays so I don't do rosary but the family does the praying…God give you your life when you were born…Actually God doesn't, yeah, but actually God never chooses. He just, everybody equal (laughs). He's not a politician (laughs). Actually see, people that goes to church all the time…they easily what you call uh, easily released…pressure, or whatever…But see, as I said, somebody gets it, somebody

don't. Everybody is equal. Not because you're black or white or brown you know, everybody the same. No discrimination.

Daily vigilance of prayer

Every participant spoke of having some kind of daily prayer routine. The women reported more activities in their prayer routines than the men. Participant 1 shared: "No I don't pray the rosary but I just, you know, just pray a few words, you know, short prayers." When he was asked if he prayed in the morning when he woke up and throughout the day, he said: "Well it all depends when sometimes you don't do it and actually for Sunday we have the whole, you know, prayers so that's pretty good. Open the TV on Sundays and I go to mass on the TV." Participant 3 explained her prayer routine:

> Well I say my rosary at the house and then every Sunday I go to church…Saturday evening I go to church. I make it a point to on a Saturday evening at 6 o'clock for mass. If I don't go on a Saturday, I go on a Sunday. But other than that, I say my rosary or my novena here. I say my rosary every night and the rest of my evening before I go to sleep I say my prayers. And then I used to go to Padre Pio (mass) on Wednesdays but since I'm already at the age of 80, my eyes are not very good driving at night, so I have to stay. But before I was very involved and active in the church. I was a lector in the church.

Participant 5 said she prayed when she woke up in the morning and stated:

> Yes, I do that. I do that before I go to sleep I have to, you know I pray. I say the pray that you know be thankful for the day and then I read my bible every night before I go to sleep.

Participant 6 said he prayed in the mornings and before he went to sleep. He did not say the rosary everyday because it was too long for him. Instead, he would say a short prayer. Participant 4 said she prayed the rosary and the novenas for San Jose, Santa Maria, and San Antonio.

The participants expressed clearly that God was the center of their life. Their faith and trust in God was strong and unwavering. They prayed daily to thank God for his blessings and turned to him whenever they faced difficult times. They understood that they owed their lives and everything in it to God, and they believed that God would never abandon them. These Chamorus were truly strong in the faith. In the next section, the coping strategies of the participants will be explored.

Area 3: COPING STRATEGIES

This section aimed to explore two aspects of coping strategies: 1) the participants' coping preferences for handling problems either individually or collectively, and 2) how they were able to cope with major life-changing events such as the death of a close loved one, or facing a major life-threatening illness.

Coping Preferences

Every participant shared the use of a flexible combination of self-reliance for handling problems individually if they were able to do so, but also utilized the help of family members when situations required family involvement. Participant 1 gave the following statement:

> Well, if I could do it myself, I could go ahead and do it but you have to be patient, what you call it? You have to be strong and you have to be *mesngon*, what it is, to do it, you know, because it's a hardship. But if you have a little help it be more easy for you so you're not gonna be too, too much stressed out on that one. So it don't make you very, you aren't too *mesngon* because your easy there, you know. See? So if you do it yourself and uh, you know, you're just like a, like a sacrifice a little bit. It's a very uh, uh, uh…it's a very important word „cause you use that word, mostly anything that uh, is part of your life because whatever you could uh, you could do it yourself, you don't depend on nobody and that's *mesngon* too. Anything that you could do that you know is hard, you don't, you have to, like what is saying, you wanna put roofing on top, and you have nobody but you can figure out how your gonna get that roof up there. So what you do is to get a ladder and you get that, you tie the container and get it up there, and a little, one by one up there. So you get the roofing tin by yourself instead of getting someone

to pass the roofing tin up. See? Those are the things. It's very hard, it's little bit, hard sacrifice little bit in there, but you could do it yourself. So you don't depend on nobody.

When participant 5 was able to handle problems on her own she did, but when she experienced family problems, she would talk to her daughter or her sisters. She stated:

Oh, yes I do you know when I, think I have daughter that you know we sit down and we talk about whatever problems comes. You know like my son here has his problem was you know he's not working, you know there's so you know there's times when I feel sorry I have to at least open up my arms for him. So you know I talk to my daughter and makes, and sometimes I need my sisters, you know if I have problems with my son we'll talk about it and so you know, it's just to let it get out of my system you know, if I'm you know if it's hurting in my chest. But that's the only way you know you just have to express yourself sometimes and because if you keep everything in yourself, you're gonna collapse too. So now we talk about it, and you know.

Depending on the seriousness of the problem, participant 6 stated: "Counsel yourself or family if it's really hard problem. „Cause you know it's what they say, two heads better than one. You cannot do it yourself, then use another head." Participant 4 also spoke of using a hybrid strategy when facing problems:

If it is just my problem then it is just me but if it is a family problem then it would be the father if he is here and the mother and would gather the family altogether to pray. It is the same when there is the death, then everyone prays. Everyone prays.

Coping With Major Life-Changing Events

Whether it was facing the death of a close family member or enduring a major life-threatening illness, such as a heart attack or cancer, the participants shared that they received support from family members and prayed to God for his help.

Coping with the death of a spouse

Participant 4 remembered when her husband died of a heart attack and she wondered how she was going to be able to provide for her eight children.

The following is her account:

> It was heavy when my husband died because my husband did. My husband helped me with everything. We prayed together and we were together no matter what. When my husband passed away, I was thinking of how I am going to take care of things now? My children and I need to pray because it is God that helps us but if we do not pray then what are we going to do?…Nothing. God is the one who is always there. His hands is always watching over us. When we pray we feel much better. My children and I are always praying and they remember that we would be praying every day, morning and night before we sleep.

She went on to say:

> It is God who helped me and mother Mary because I did not forget to pray and I asked them to help give me strength and give me what I need to take care of my children so that they could have a good future, and that my children will pray. Then when my children were bigger those who were able to work did like become teachers and that helped.

Participant 4 also stated that she received help from her family members during that difficult period in her life.

> My sister-in-law and sister helped me. My sister-in-law helped me by telling me to continue to pray because God is the one who took your husband and it is better where he is at now. My brother would come over to the house and get whatever I had that I was farming so he could sell it at the market for me. My sister and sister-in-law would give me advice. No one helped me raise my children because they were all grown and my youngest at the time was eleven years old. And I didn't need anyone to watch them because I stayed at home. I did whatever was needed to take care of my children and myself.

Participant 5's husband died less than a year before the time of the interview. She recalled how her son really helped her care for her sick and disabled husband before he passed away, and how her daughter was always calling and visiting her to provide comfort and emotional support. She mentioned that she and her children came together and discussed the meaning of her husband's death. Together they felt that "maybe it's time that the Lord, it's better for him to go than to suffer you know, because he was only, he was bedridden by the time."

Coping with a major life-threatening illness

When participant 2 suffered a heart attack that left him physically weakened on one half of his body for about four months, he said he turned to God and prayed, and that helped him recuperate.

> Yeah, accident that I had. Yeah and with a prayer, helps also me. You have to believe and you have to have in your heart, and believe that God actually is watching us. And when you ask for help, if you believe him, then you know he's gonna help you. But if you don't believe, and one half is something else, he won't help you.

He recalled at that time: "I think that maybe God wants me to go." But throughout his physical therapy, he attributed prayer to his eventual recovery. "Yeah, little bit by praying *nai*, to see that I get better. Then the prayer, that's the most important thing is if you pray and you believe in God almighty, (he) helps you. He went on to say: "While I recuperating, all I think, I always say I'll go to church, pray, thanking God almighty that I survive." He also explained how his wife, his two grandsons, and his granddaughter were instrumental in his recovery. They were present whenever he needed help with anything during that time, and his grandchildren were especially important because they took turns staying over-night with him at his home.

Participants 1, 2, 3, and 6 all mentioned how they all had family members to support them through their major illnesses. Even when participants 1 and 6 had to receive treatment outside of Guahan, they each had family members who were able to travel with them and care for them. Participant 1 underwent a quintuple heart bypass, continued to suffer from bouts of skin cancer, and had Type II diabetes. At that time, he stated that he still received help from his wife and children during emergencies and for his everyday needs. Participant 3 suffered from two heart attacks. She recalled how her children were present during those times to assist her. Lastly, participant 6 suffered from

an aneurism in his stomach that required off-island surgery to insert a stent. He stated he was not feeling scared at that time because his wife and daughter were with him. "The family's there, yeah. And actually there's nothing that he can do. That's where the religion comes in, your faith."

The experience of the death of a loved one or a major life-threatening illness represented a period of time in the lives of the participants of great uncertainty and hardship. It was a time that could have easily broken the spirit of an individual. But these participants remained steadfast in the midst of such trying circumstances. They were accepting of whatever God had planned for them.   Participant 6 said it best: "I just let it flow you know." The next section focuses on understanding the participants' concept of death and dying.

<div align="center">Area 4: CONCEPTIONS OF DEATH AND DYING</div>

The objectives of this section were to: 1) inquire into the participants' acceptance of death and dying and the rationale underlying that acceptance or non-acceptance, and 2) discover any Chamoru customs that are related to death and understand their significance.

<div align="center">*Understanding and Accepting God's Will*</div>

The participants all voiced an understanding and acceptance of the reality of death in their lives. Some of those accounts were already articulated in the previous section on the participants' coping strategies. The following testimonies will help explain the perspectives of the participants.

Participant 1 explained his view on death and dying in the following way:

> I just accept whatever happened you know, that, I just put it this way, we all gotta go sometime, and we're just living here, some people, some living here short term temporary and some here living long term temporary. And they all temporary. I'm living so long, so long years but I'm living here temporary. For I'm the long

<div align="center">60</div>

term. And the others that live very young, they living short term temporary. And that's the difference between those two. And I feel that way. That's the way I feel. Because nobody's gonna be here permanent. Regardless of what you say, what you think, when you look around, you don't see them sometime anymore „cause they gone. So I don't care if it's the president of the United States or who; he's gonna go sometime (laughing). Whether he's a priest, he still gotta go, you know. But we all living here temporary. And the other thing *nai*, in other words, a lot of people, since the price of dying is so expensive that people, they don't wanna die. When they, they said they wanna go to heaven but they don't wanna go die either. They go to heaven, they don't wanna die. You know, that's how they feel. So there's the other way, you never go to heaven, you got to die. See?

Participant 2 viewed death as God's will. He gave the following statement when he talked about attending a funeral: "I think God wants her, and that's the way. You cannot say no." Participant 3 shared a similar view as she spoke of how people have told her that it is harder to experience the death of one's child rather than one's spouse. She stated:

But with me, I don't know „cause it hasn't happened to me but I think both (laughs). I don't know if my husband goes…but I feel there's nothing you can do, pray, you know. You cannot be, what you call it, angry or what. Why did you do it? Why me? You know, let go. It's God's decision.

Participant 5 expressed her views this way: "I think when you believe in God you know when you have a, well the…everyone of us is gonna die. And there's a feeling that you know, when you die is just like when you're sleeping, you're just sleeping." She stated further: "I know I believe in God that you know it's just like you said he's still sleeping until the lord will come again on the second time that's when. So my feeling is I know he's resting peacefully."

Chamoru Customs in Death

In Chamoru culture, the participants articulated that it is customary for funerals to turn into major gatherings that were attended by many people. It is common to see the many extended family members and friends of the deceased present at the funeral. The

participants explained that funerals function as ways to bring all family members and

friends together to give comfort and support to the grieving family. Participant 1 stated:

> Well it's important that one, it's the custom of the Chamoru that they, when a good friend that comes to, you know, when you have something happen to you, your family, he show up and they give you, they help you out with the help of doing things for you or they come there to give you money, to help out on your expense. So that means the person is coming to your place, so that means that you have to go that place because they didn't forget you. They remember you as a good friend. You know, that's why they coming to you.

Participant 3 gave the following sentiments about funerals in Chamoru culture:

> One thing about it, funeral, yes that's very true, especially among families, just brothers and sisters. But your cousins, second cousins, or third cousins, it doesn't have to be just your first cousins. That's when they all come out. And I notice my husband's family, now they're getting old, can't hardly walk, but before, when my husband was younger, anybody that dies, among the cousins or what, everybody show up. But once something happen in the family, a death, they all come. Pago (now), very seldom, just the wife show up or what „cause they are aging. But it's very, when death comes, that's when you see all your families and your friends. It's nice because they still think of you. They try to be there.

She went on to stress that it's important to attend the funerals of friends, and not

just family members. She stated:

> Now the friends, if a friend of a friend of a friend, and you're close to them, so you want to go and give them your condolence, to them „cause, you know, it's a loss of the family. So you want to comfort. So that's the reason why I try to be there, more comforting.

Participant 5 shared similar sentiments that were explained accordingly:

> I think it's just our culture. The Chamoru culture is you know when somebody dies in the family we all go together just to you know help each other one way you know just to like I said comfort each other. But it's just like that's the way how the culture is the Chamoru way. If very close friends you know friends and like I said even that it's just a friend you know we just wanna go and show our you know, to show that hey we care for you know to help them out in their mourning. So that how what happened to me you know. Now I mean I feel the same. I couldn't believe that when he (her husband) passed away and when he you know he was out and he was only like two and a half hours from 930 a.m. to 1130 a.m. (viewing of the body) you know at the church you won't believe that there the people just keep coming in even when they're gonna start the mass. All

the friends that I know for the longest time when I retired I didn't see them, they were there. They said „cause at work they call me mama and when they saw my name in the newspaper, they said hey that's our friend you know, let's go. I was shocked because I wasn't expecting because it was just a quick death you know, and the announcement was not that long. Like I said he died on the twenty-first, we have to bury him right after „cause it (was) I think it's before Christmas or after Christmas but before new (year) „cause we don't wanna open up the new year for…so he was, he died. I think we buried him on the twenty-ninth and that was Thursday, right a day, 2 or 3 days after Christmas. „Cause twenty-first *nai* December 21st, he died…Oh yeah I was just you know, I cried but then you know I was so happy that hey, there's all my friends that I haven't seen for the longest time.

In Chamoru culture, there is the custom of giving *chenchule'* during important life events such as births, weddings, and funerals. *Chenchule'* is an outward expression of lending help and support to others in the form of gifts, money, and labor. It is common to see a *chenchule'* box at funerals that is usually located at front of the church and positioned off to the side, which holds all of the monetary donations that people have given. Participant 5 stated that giving *chenchule'* really helps out the family because of the high costs that are incurred from organizing a funeral. Participant 6 articulated: "You don't have to give but you know, our culture is, we still do that to help. You're helping the family that actually in need. You wanna help." In the next section, the participants' experience and views on suicide will be discussed.

<div align="center">Area 5: PERSPECTIVES ON SUICIDE</div>

This section served four purposes: 1) to review the incidence of suicide in this particular generation of Chamorus, 2) to gain insight into their views for the causes of suicide in Guahan and in the U.S., 3) to identify the existence of any cultural stigmas regarding suicide, and 4) to elicit from each participant possible solutions for preventing suicide.

<div align="center">*Incidence of Suicide*</div>

With most of the participants approaching almost a century of life, it was

interesting that the participants recalled hearing little to nothing about suicide during their

childhood, youth, and young adulthood. It was not until the local media publicized

suicide that the participants started to become aware of a suicide problem on Guahan.

Participant 1 had only two distant recollections of suicide in his life-time. One episode

was when he was eighteen years old and serving in the U.S. Navy. He spoke about how

his friend in the navy who was also Chamoru, committed suicide while they were

stationed in Hawaii.   He had the following to say about the second episode: "Yeah, yeah

there's one that, there's one in East *Hagåtña*, that staying in East *Hagåtña* that commit

suicide. What we heard is, he just say he hang himself. But that's all we know."

Overall, participant 1 could not recall any other suicides until the media began to openly

publicize suicide to the entire community of Guahan.

Participant 2 had this to say about suicide on Guahan:

> Oh no, until after the war. I never heard about any suicide before the war. I never heard of course on the suicide cases uh, even now, you know, even recently they don't advertise. But I was reading the paper, they just mentioning now about suicide. Tell you the truth, I never heard except one time about fifteen years ago uh, my wife's cousin died uh, suicide. And that's the only time I heard, know, my relative. But the other suicides uh, I never heard, „cause they never advertise.

Participant 3 shared that during the olden days, things such as suicide were kept

secretive. She stated:

> Oh, before the war they won't tell you. Everything is hush, hush. Just like when you're pregnant (out of wedlock) in the house…hush, hush, hush, hush! All the diapers they cannot be hang out on the clothes line. Hang it hid inside. That's before the war. They're very, what you call it, secretive. It's really an embarrassment, this is pre-war. Anybody in the family that got pregnant, or got killed, hang himself or what, well you know, they would try to cover them up. Family are very close knit. They won't say those things. But after the war, like I say, and they pregnant, they will not let them go out. You don't know whether she's pregnant or what. They just stay there. But after the war, oh my God,

style…live together or whatever. Sometimes I read in the newspaper that it's better to live together before you get married. That's the style now. Before it's a no no no!

Participant 4, who was the eldest of the group, mentioned that she never heard of any suicides in her life time because she stayed home to raise her children. Participant 5 also shared that suicide was not prevalent on Guahan. She stated: "Yeah there's hardly, I mean it's just recently that those things are happening. But my sister-in-law (committed suicide) I know because maybe that's like fifteen years ago, I'm not so sure." Participant 6 agreed that suicide was not prevalent in his generation but he attributed this to the fact that the population was small when he was growing up on Guahan. He did, however, confirm that when a suicide did happen to a family, the family would take precautions to keep the situation private. Participant 6 stated:

> See actually those are very before, that's a secret word, I mean you know, people doesn't advertise it *nai* you know, now it's differently they publish it. But before you hardly know because actually they keep it to their family. See it's some sort of like a scandal.

Cultural Stigmas

With participants reporting a low incidence of suicide in their generation, it was necessary to search for the existence of cultural stigmas in Chamoru society that could prove useful in explaining the low suicide rates in the *manåmko'* population. As expressed by the participants, there was a need for a family to keep the tragedy of a suicide in the privacy of their own home. The participants used words such as: "embarrassment, scandal, and secret" when they spoke of suicide. At first glance, it appears that suicide was viewed by the participants as something embarrassing, shameful, or distasteful. But when the participants were asked the question, do you feel a person who committed suicide should be given a proper Christian burial? Their responses all

seemed to illustrate that using descriptions such as embarrassment or shame, did not accurately describe the sentiments and feelings that Chamorus were experiencing following a suicide.

First of all, they all expressed that they did not see anything wrong with allowing suicide victims a proper Christian burial, whether that be a Catholic or SDA funeral. Secondly, they gave sentiments that families who had the misfortune of experiencing suicide should be given lots of help in such a great time of need. Family members of the victim needed the prayers and emotional support, and the victim needed the prayers as well. They all felt that passing negative judgments on situations such as suicide were futile since only God had the right to judge people. Feelings of shame and embarrassment may have existed during such circumstances, which was most likely due to the earlier Catholic position that suicide was a mortal sin and thus, those who took their lives were not "worthy" of the blessings of God and therefore could not be afforded a proper burial rites.

But as the participants expressed in their responses, they did not share the doctrinal views of the Catholic institution. They implied that suicide was not a situation that they really viewed as something distasteful or shameful in the community even though the Catholic Church took a hard position. Rather it was viewed simply as a real tragedy of life. To the participants, feelings of embarrassment and shame were easily overshadowed by the tremendous sorrow and grieving that was experienced. They recognized the need for the community to give lots of prayers and support to the families who were suffering. Therefore, it could be reasoned that Chamorus felt the need to keep suicide private because of the tremendous sorrow and heavy grieving that was

experienced. Families needed time for themselves to mourn peacefully among themselves in order to heal from the tragedy. The following accounts will highlight this interpretation.

Participant 1 shared:

> Uh, whether I see it a different way, that that person's not in the right mind and he could be insane, and he's not responsible for what happened to himself. And I think it's nothing wrong to bury him in a Catholic church, in a Catholic service, whatever the Catholic service, bury him in a Catholic cemetery. Yeah, that's way I feel.

As one of only two participants who were of SDA faith, participant 2 shared: "I feel the person should be given a service and burial „cause you don't know what happened before *nai*. You don't know if the person asks God to forgive him. So you don't know." Before being asked her views on burial rights for Catholics who committed suicide, participant 3 was asked to explain the community's reaction to families experiencing the tragedy of suicide. The following is an excerpt of the interview with participant 3:

> Interviewer: So if something like that happened, what does the community do? Do they not talk to that family?
> Participant 3: "You back off from the family."
> Interviewer: They don't want anything to do them?
> Participant 3: "No, no, no! You have to, what you call it…"
> Interviewer: Keep your distance?
> Participant 3: "No! That's when they need you. You know, if it's something family. You don't have to go in there and keep asking questions, why did she do it duh, duh, duh. You're there to comfort. You know if anything happens to that, your neighbor or your friend, all you have to do is go there and comfort. But the worst thing to do is to, why did he do it? You know, anything like that, you come in, comfort and that's it. Don't say much. But don't come in with all your questions. They're not talking."
> Interviewer: So even though there's an embarrassment to the family or they feel the shame on the family but people will still go there…

Participant 3: "They still welcome you."
Interviewer: They still welcome you.
Participant 3: "Oh yes."
Interviewer: So they're still at least…
Participant 3: "If they know, they still welcome you."
Interviewer: They'll feel sorry for you.
Participant 3: "They still welcome you, of course. That person who has a son or a daughter that did something, they still welcome you."

Participant 3 went on to explain that she accepted the idea of suicide victims receiving a Catholic burial because the times on Guahan have changed. She recalled how the Catholic Archdiocese during her upbringing would never allow suicide victims a proper Catholic burial. She said that church policy changed when Guahan's governor at the time, Ricardo "Ricky" Bordallo committed suicide and was granted burial rites from the Archbishop who was and still is the head of the Catholic Archdiocese on Guahan. She stated:

> Everything's changed. Pre-war, I guess, if I'm right. I'm not very sure. I'm eleven years old. I'm not quite sure. But people like that who committed suicide cannot be buried in *Pigo* (Catholic cemetery) inside. If you do something like that or even if the babies are born and not been baptized, they will bury you in *Pigo* but there's one side for all those kids that are not baptized. This side, and this side are for all the children that are baptized. That's *Pigo*. That's what I was so shocked. After the war when, look at Bordallo. They give him a nice funeral. I was quite surprised that the Archbishop walked from the church down to *Pigo*. I was shocked because as much as I learned my Catholic faith, I hear or I, I don't know whether I learned that in catechism. I don't know, I cannot remember. But there's one thing, if you kill yourself…if somebody kill you, yeah, you can be put there. But if you kill yourself, hang yourself, you're out. They cannot put you there. That has to be…I don't know where. They have to put you know, *Pigo* church is only for Catholic people. If you're not Catholic, you cannot, if you're not a Catholic I guess you cannot be buried. But when Bordallo *nai* died, I was surprised when they took him down to *Pigo*. And what a beautiful mass he had! He had a beautiful mass! And the Archbishop, he walks from the church all the way down with the, there's a *carabao nai*, all the way down to *Pigo*. So I said, that's it. They cut everything off. Changed everything…Beautiful! The mass is beautiful! I remember the mass was beautiful. But it changed.

Participant 4 expressed that she felt that it was God's decision to judge and decide if a suicide victim should receive a proper burial. She stated: "I don't know, no one knows but God. It is up to the family what to do or what should be done because they know." She also expressed the following opinion on governor Bordallo's death:

> I feel that he went up to heaven and he died naturally. God knows what is in his heart, that he has a good heart and his last rites were read to him by the priest. The people that were working down there heard the gunshot and realized that it was Bordallo so they took him to the hospital. The priest came and read him his last rites. So it was like he died a natural death. I believe that he is up in heaven because he is a good man with a good heart so he deserved to have a beautiful burial and service.

Participant 5 also felt that there was no longer a stigma associated with suicide on Guahan because she preferred to leave judgment to God. She stated: "No I don't but it's OK. I mean there must be like I said hey, the only one that can forgive us *uyu* is God. Anything that happens hey, it's just between you and God." She also expressed that she had no qualms with governor Bordallo receiving funeral rites. She stated:

> Yes, I think yes, yes because I think my belief is when you, you know, die, prayer is needed also. You know, you just have to, that's like I said when he could, when he already died and commit suicide and died hey, that's just between the one that commits suicide. So the only that needs is for us to pray for comfort…So hopefully that by praying and pray for him but then we also have to pray for ourself, to give us comfort and hopefully we don't do what that suicide person did…Yeah, that person that die you know, between God and him. Whatever he did that's coming from himself. He (governor Bordallo) did it for himself. There's nothing we can do, we cannot bring him back. And we, all we need is prayer, forgive him though like I said, whatever they did to him, they do so much for him to honor I don't, that doesn't bother me.

Participant 6 also recounted the old practices of the Catholic church and stated:

> See it all depends on the Catholic bishop. The bishop does all that. You know they have the (Catholic) law. See like if you hang yourself, they don't put you inside the group, bury you inside the cemetery. They usually put you outside. Actually it's around the premises but it's not, there's a boundary there. But I don't know now you know. You see the law has changed. I don't know.

He also felt that a suicide victim should be allowed a proper burial because God was the only one who can judge people. He shared:

> Actually for me, it should be, it should be in there, you know. You know, it's no discrimination. Because we're equal *nai*. See, brown and white they're all the same, unless you paint yourself *nai*, you know they change different color. God is the only one that actually can punish you *nai*.

Based on the accounts of the participants there appears to be no longer a cultural stigma towards suicide in Chamoru society. Suicide was viewed simply and sincerely as a tragedy that required the community to come together and pray for the victims and their families.

Causes of Suicide on Guahan and in the U.S.

The participants suggested various causes of suicide that ranged from mental illness, too much stress in life, a lack of faith and trust in God, problems in the family, a lack of communication and closeness between parent and child, and the size of a population. For example, participant 1 believed that people who committed suicide were not in their right state of mind. He felt that if a man were driven to the point of insanity, "He's not responsible for what happened to himself." He further stated that the inability to bear the burden of multiple life stressors and accept hardships could lead to the development of a negative outlook on life and eventually suicide. He stated:

> No. It just that it happened to himself. Whether he have too much stressor, too much stress to themselves or having a very difficult life, and they couldn't handle it anymore, either the person owes lot of money and he cannot pay back, and the law is after him, you know and all that stuff, that uh, that putting the pressure on him. See? So he feel that it not worth to live. He doesn't care anymore, he doesn't wanna live anymore because he doesn't want to suffer all that pressure that's part of his life. So it's not worth to live. That's what he thinks.

Participant 1 went on to explain that the high suicide rates found among elderly Americans can be attributed to the following reasons:

Well, you know, a lot of things that depends on those people, the *manåmko'* nai, whether they were abused, nobody seems to care for them and they think other people, those families they don't think he's important anymore „cause they got nothing to gain on him. And that means he feels so bad that I don't want to live anymore because nobody cares for me. And uh, right now I'm uh suffering. He thinks that every day. He build, he start to build a lot of tension and uh, develops some kind of, some kind of mentally ill that he's not really himself anymore. And might be liable to suicide, to take suicide himself you know, he kill himself. And or the other thing he might be in a big financial that he doesn't want to go to jail. He prefer to suicide and died. He's just not worth living. If he live, he might put in jail, and he get fined and he couldn't pay that. He'll be living and he'll never pay it up, so why think about that. After I'm gone, I don't have to think anymore. And that's how people makes suicide.

Participant 2 believed that mental problems and family problems were two likely causes of suicide. He articulated: "Like I say, there could be something mental. Or there maybe some problems in the family. Some bad things happening in the family like abuse. But I don't really know „cause I never heard about that before." He also believed that suicide rates were greatly affected by population size. The greater the population size, the more suicides would occur. Guahan has the smaller population compared to the U.S., and therefore, has a lower rate of suicide in its *manåmko'* population.

Participant 3 felt that faith prevents Chamorus from committing suicide, and that a lack of closeness between parent and child contributes to the high rate of suicides in the U.S. She shared her views on the parent-child relationship accordingly:

I don't know if I'm correct but probably the elderly if they have children, nobody cares for them, and they're all disgusted. That's one thing if you don't, especially when you have children, and not one of them even pick up the phone. If you not able to come and see them „cause you're here to there, you know, but at least the phone is working. You don't have to say much just say hey mom, how are you? Love you. That I love you is very powerful! Always say I love you. Loving is very much appreciated with the *manåmko'*. All you need is say, love you. But one thing about the *manåmko'* probably they're suicide, they're committing suicide because especially when they have children, and when they are living by themselves, husband or wife dies, they have children and nobody…it's understandable if they live from one end to the other end, and they don't have the money to fly out and you know what. But pick up the phone. All you have to say

is, hey mom, I cannot talk to you too long but I love you. Love you is a very powerful word! That's what parents wants to hear. Love you mom. Love you son. Right? When you hear that, love you, you're so happy. But if you don't hear nothing, probably she doesn't care for me (laughs).

Participant 4 also believed that a lack of faith in God causes people to commit suicide. She stated: "They have a, feel very hurt and sad. And there are some who do not pray to God to ask him to help them because God himself is always there." She continued:

They probably don't pray and then that is what happened. Maybe they are not praying and asking God to help them so that is why they are thinking of those bad things and the devil. Because if you are praying, God will always help you.

Participant 5 believed that depression and not being happy in life caused people to commit suicide which was based upon her firsthand experience of losing her sister-in-law to suicide. She felt that her sister-in-law committed suicide because she was depressed over the fact of her husband's infidelity. She shared:

I think they're depressed I should say. Something in their life you know that hurts their feeling because I can just with my experience with my sister-in-law. But she was kind of like mentally…she's a jealous type, I should say with my brother and you know my brother is something else. You know he's a like I said I can say he's a lover-boy you know, things like that, that's what makes, I think that's what makes her depressed.

Participant 5 also believed that the American custom of placing elderly parents in retirement homes could contribute to elderly suicide. On the other hand, she felt that the Chamoru custom that obligates the children to care for their parents in old age helps protect the *manåmko'* from suicide. The following narrative highlights her sentiments:

Uh, like I said you know maybe because the, I don't know *nai* about the American way. But us *nai* the Chamoru people uh, there's hardly any of us like you know when like us if we still have our parents, our mom and dad. When they're old, we take care of them. But I don't know *nai* about the American people because once they're old they bring them to the homes, you know the retirement homes that they stay there and maybe some of them cannot afford to

stay on the retirement home. That I can see why maybe it's usually staying home doing or maybe they prefer to die. That's the way I feel about those people back there. But for us here *nai* in Guam, I should say there's, because we come from a big family, one of us, one of the kids I know guarantee will take care of your mom, and me, because I know how. I retired right away is because I wanna take care of dad and my mom. And mostly like I said, mostly everybody, elderly now, you know there's always one in the kids that take care of them. Even now even though we have those welfare and there's so many helps but I still think that there's always one in the family, one of out of the five takes care of their parents when they're old. Yeah somebody always help.

Participant 6 also felt that population size affected the occurrence of suicide. In large societies like the U.S., he thought that there were so many elderly people in America that those social services that were available to them were ill equipped to provide for such a large population. He also believed that even when services were available to elderly Americans, those services were unattainable because they lacked the money to pay for their needs. He stated: "Don't forget it's hardship over there, hardship."

To summarize, the participants felt that some of the major causes of suicide can be attributed to mental illnesses such as depression and insanity; cultural differences regarding the care of elderly people; a lack of faith in God; family problems like abuse; scarcity of resources such as social services and money; an inability to endure long periods of hardship; as well as population size.

Preventive Interventions

To gather some suggestions for preventive interventions that the participants themselves felt could be useful against suicide, the participants were asked to share their views on the things that they felt helped protect the Chamoru *manåmko'* from suicide, and to explain the kind of advice they would give to a young person whom they knew was contemplating suicide or attempted suicide.

Chamoru culture

Chamoru culture is very family-oriented and socially interconnected. Some of the customs regarding family obligations serve to protect the *manåmko'* from suicide and other self-destructive behaviors. For example, as participant 5 mentioned in the previous section, it is customary for the children to care for their elderly parents. Having family support is a crucial part of the overall health of the *manåmko'*. Other Chamoru customs that center around funerals and its social atmosphere, also serve a protective purpose. Participant 1 shared the following aspects of Chamoru culture that protect the *manåmko'*:

> One is the custom, another way that you know, the custom here keep the *manåmko'* mostly a lot of life „cause they have fiesta , they have places to go, you know, they still could enjoy themselves by going to those places. And uh, those *manåmko'*, that's the reason why they uh, they are not really stressed out. They might have a difficult time but you know, they still find time that they will be back to normal and, and they alright. So, it's the culture mostly that they believe and a lot of share a, people that belong to a, religious people, that believe you know, on the, they believe on the religious and that's one way they keep them out, they still alive. Yeah, because they believe on that. But people who don't believe on that, that they doesn't care, those people might commit suicide.

He also explained that the Chamoru custom of community that encourages people, especially the *manåmko'*, to make efforts to attend the funerals of even distant family members and friends to give prayers and show support to the families, plays a role in the protection of the *manåmko'*. He felt that the customary social atmosphere that was found in Chamoru gatherings such as funerals served to maintain the healthy social bonds between families and friends, especially during times of sadness. Participant 1 explained:

> Well, like what I said, the custom here, you know, even old people that able to go uh, they like to go to the place where you know, uh people, when they go to a dead, that uh, to a funeral or whatever it is, they go there regardless of how they old, as long as somebody will take them and some *manåmko'* feel that way. That it's part of, at least, it's part of their life and they enjoy doing that. Yeah, you know, and maybe sometime they meet their friend or old friend there, and they enjoy that because they meet that people, they didn't see them for a long time and

they happy, you know. So that means it give them back some kind of a noble way of thinking, you know. So that's how the culture, a lot of the culture, save a lot of the people.

Pray to God

A recurrent solution given by the participants towards any problems in life was to turn to God for help. The participants were fervent believers that God could help everyone overcome any hardships if they prayed and asked God for assistance. When participant 2 was asked to give advice to young people who were contemplating suicide he stated: "I would tell him to pray to take time and pray to God. Ask God to help you. And maybe go and talk to his family or 'cause he's young still." Participant 4 also felt that the best advice she could give to a suicidal person was to pray to God. She stated: "I would tell them to pray because God will help and guide you so that you don't think of bad things." This was her constant solution to all of life's problems. Participant 6 also stated if a young person told him that he or she wanted to commit suicide, he would tell the youth not to kill himself. He shared that he would ask the youth why his or her life was bad, and he would explain to that person that suicide was not the right way to deal with hardships. He advised the youths to attend church and go to confession. He stated: "Priest will give him advice."

Participant 5 also felt that telling the youth to pray to God was the best advice to give to someone who was suicidal. She shared a very personal story of her experience and the things she did to help her grandson when he told her that he wanted to commit suicide. This is her account:

> I was just *nai* talking to my son (her grandson) because you know, sometimes he himself also, sometimes also said, Why that my mom died? Why did she die? He said maybe, I mean you know when he gets mad and he said, maybe I wanna die. I said boy let me tell you, when you're going to do things like that remember that

hey, there's always one God up there that looks upon you. Anything that you do is just for yourself. But think of your future, don't think about those uh you know, those are not important in life. You know you need to go on with your life, live happily, and enjoy life. But when the Lord calls you, okay go. But to kill yourself you know hey, that's against the will of God because hey, the Lord giveth and taketh but it's on the right time. Not when you just wanna do it too. I said don't you think of things like that because it's not gonna do you any good.

Open communication, encouragement, and support

Participant 3 believed that talking to the youth was important as well as teaching them the importance of voicing their problems and frustrations to others such as a family member or priest. She felt strongly that healthy open communication between parent and child was a crucial way to protect the youth from suicide. She stressed that it was important for the youth to be unafraid to talk openly to their parents and family whenever they experienced problems in their life. She shared:

Talk to them. Ask them what is the problem, you know. Ask him what is the problem. Why are you gonna do that? Like I say, if it's about the father or the mother or what, if he's scared of the father, sit down and talk to him. Now, family are more open than before. So my advice is don't be afraid of the father or your mother. Don't be afraid to talk to them. Don't be afraid because they don't know your feelings, and we don't know each other's feelings. So you have to talk to your father. How would I know? How would I know if you don't come to me? How would you know about me if I don't come to you? So you have to talk to me, don't be afraid.

If a young person did not have a mother or father to talk to, she said:

Talk to somebody else. If your friend cannot help you, go to a priest. If you don't want to see the priest, just go out there. Don't be afraid. Because if you don't talk, you don't let out, how would, you know, that's how I would explain. How would I know how you're feeling? How would you know how I'm feeling? You have to talk. Talk, talk, talk!

When participant 1 was asked to give advice to a potentially suicidal youth, he felt that taking the time out to simply sit down and talk to the youth was an important step

to help that person from committing suicide, and help them to understand life better. He

stated:

> If the person is not violence you know, that he's able to talk to me. I'll give him
> an advice and I'll talk to him that, you know, he's young and he got a lot of future
> ahead of him. And in a way that, you know, think about it that your life is,
> especially in a family that will hurt your family because you did that or whatever
> gonna happen to you and maybe he'll change his mind by listening to you that,
> you know, trying to talk to him about, that try to talk to him about another way of
> uh, doing things and tell him that he is young and uh, he's got a life, a lot of life to
> go and you know, enjoy the world.

If a youth told him that life was too hard for him or her to go on, participant 1felt

that by sitting down and offering support to that youth, that person may realize that there

were people that cared for him or her. Participant 1 stated:

> Well if he say my life is too hard then, you know, you could offer him something
> like that, said well hey, why don't you uh, we go out and have a, I'll lets go have
> some coffee or lets go have a lunch and have McDonald or like that you know,
> and if he's very calm people but he real stressed out that he's not too himself and
> maybe he'll go along with you by doing that he'd saw you that you are kind to
> him and he probably realize that there's a person that likes me, and a lot of people
> that don't like me, that's the reason why I'm not like myself ,,cause they don't like
> me, I'm not important anymore. You know, so really he change his mind.

Utilizing mental health services

Participant 5 understood the importance of constantly talking to her grandson to

help him understand life better, especially when tragedies and hardships arise. But she

also recognized the usefulness of mental health services and brought him to counseling at

the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (DMHSA) treatment facility for

assistance. She went on to share:

> Because you know I remember this incident when his mom died (approximately 4
> years ago), he wants to do things also, he wants to die. But I said no son, there's a
> good reason why your mom died because she died before his graduation, and that
> really, he was really mentally disturbed too, my boy. But I tried to talk to him,
> son, there must be a good reason why your mom left before you graduate. I said I
> mean, don't try to hurt yourself. You have to go on with your life. Your mom

now is resting. She's not suffering. I know she's hurting because she left you but that's okay. You're in good hands, I'm taking care of you, and I never said no for an answer if your mom wants to come and see you. Hey, I would always open my door. But then for him you know, he doesn't really know his mom. Fourteen years he didn't see his mom. But you know, he was depressed too. But I tried to talk to him you know, bring him to the counseling so he can be counseled.

She continued:

I kind of worried about him. Then I keep talking to him, son, it's not gonna do you any good. Don't do it, don't, your mom is already gone. He said, „But why mom? Why does things like that…why does my mom never cares?' I said no there's, I know between you, your mom, and your dad, I don't know because like I said I told them before…you know because drugs is drugs is the one that really like…I said don't be like your dad. That's why I said, go continue on, continue on with your school because if I'm gone, your dad is not gonna come to help you. You have to help yourself. But he was, my boy was really depressed. I know he was really hurting. And I understand I really even like I said, I said Lord please help my son because I know he's into that but because he, sometimes he cries out loud. You know hey, I don't blame him for being like that because like I said his mom never, never…his mom loves him but because his mom married to another guy, and the husband doesn't like him. I said, don't blame your mom because your mom loves you still, no matter what, she still loves you. But that she's resting, you have to take care of yourself. So you know he's because I always have to sit down and talk to him. Hey like I said, I take him to the counseling to be counseled because up at the mental health (DMHSA).

Participant 6 also supported the utilization of mental health services because

mental health professionals were properly trained to help people in those types of

situations. He shared:

There's people that actually does that job you know, people that have those training. But the common guy who doesn't have that kind of experience cannot give that kind of advice because you know he was not trained to do those things. He might go the opposite way.

The next section will explore the social support systems that were available to the

participants.

Area 6: SOCIAL SUPPORT

This section endeavored to describe the social support systems of each participant in three ways 1) to identify the various support systems that were available to the participants, 2) to evaluate the ease of accessing and utilizing social networks, and the effectiveness of these networks, and 3) to elucidate any cultural characteristics that serve to assist and protect the *manåmko'* through old age.

Familial Support

Every participant shared that they could rely on the support of their families to help them. Family members could be counted on for transportation to take them around their home, to the store, the doctors, or to church functions. Participant 1 shared that because of his age and inability to walk, he would ask his son to help him to his wheelchair and take him where ever he needed to go. Participant 2 felt he could rely on his grandchildren to take him to the store, but if they could not help him at that time, he would simply ask someone else for help. Participant 3 stated that she could count on her children to take her places, and if they were all unable, she could also call her niece to take her places.

Participant 4 stated that her children would pray with her, cook for her, help her to shower, and whatever else she needed on a daily basis. She mentioned that if one of her children were unable to help, then usually another of her children would help her. Participant 5 shared that she was always able to call and talk to her daughter or any of her sisters whenever she needed someone to talk to about her problems. Participant 6 also felt that he could rely on at least one of his five children to help him if he needed something. He stated that finding help from his family was not hard. He stated: "Not hard. No because see now, I don't have to holler. All I have to do now is pick up the

phone and call someone…communication. Not like before you holler and nobody's

answering (laughing)."

Not to be a burden

Although the participants were willing and able to receive help from their children

and other family members, most of them voiced how they were careful not to over burden

their children or to completely depend on their children for help. Some of the

participants like participant 2, refused to ask her children for money unless it was her last

resort because "everyone has their own family to take care of." Other participants felt

that it was unfair to burden their children and completely depend on them. For example,

participant 6 stated:

> You know, you don't burden your children, you know. The *manåmko'* they have
> little provider *nai*. You don't depend on your children on everything, like I said.
> If they come and help you, that's good. You cannot depend on the kids because
> they have their own responsibilities. It can only go so much, you know. Just be
> yourself and be satisfied with what you have. Be happy, be thoughtful, and no
> more.

The participants felt that their retirement income and the total household income

were sufficient to meet their basic needs and maintain a certain amount of self-reliance.

When their funds were not sufficient to meet their wants, they remained content that at

least their needs were met.

Interestingly, the majority of the participants shared that they did not "actively"

seek help from a priest/pastor or from their religious community with the exceptions of

participants 2 and 6. Participant 2 stated he never asked his pastor for help but that the

SDA community would always offer prayers. He stated: "People, they always offer

prayers, and we pray together for anyone who needs help. Everyone always helps by

offering prayers to that person." Although participant 6 did not "actively" seek help from

a priest or the Catholic community when he was sick, he spoke of how the priest and other church members visited him to say prayers for him.

Chamoru customs

Aside from the advancements in technology that have broken down the barriers of distance and have made communication between family members quick, easy, and efficient, a major contributor to the ease of the participants' seeking help from family members was the custom of families living together in compounds. With the exception of participant 2, every participant reported that they lived in a family compound. Their adult children with their own respective families each lived within close proximity to each other. Participant 6 joked that he had to cook more because of all his children and grandchildren living next to him.

Another major contributor to the effectiveness of the social support system for Chamoru elders is due to the custom of adult children taking the responsibility to care for their parents throughout old age. This typically meant that the *manåmko'* would live within the home of their children, or they would have one of their children or grandchildren live with them at their own home. This was why participant 2, who was the only person not living on a family compound, reported having no difficulties with finding help because his grandson was living with him. Most of the participants were very vocal about explaining the importance of this particular familial custom. Participant 1 had the following to say:

> Well uh, in Chamoru culture, in Chamoru custom *nai*, that the children that able to help their parents when they are old, the children should realize that their parents has sacrificed for them when they are small, they raised them up and do all the work for them. Now that the parents are old and they need help so they, that children they should realize than to make sure that their parents get all of the help they can for him or her because they unable to do what they suppose to do,

and they can't do it anymore. So that means they are disable, you know, the parents are disable and that what means the, they are not able to do those kinds anymore that they children would realize that, to think about that. If the children would think that way that my parents raised me up and do help me out when I was growing up and so and so, and then I would think about this because I cannot tell them for all what they did for me because it will be never enough to pay them back. Because they did a lot for me. So I wanna do something for them. I wanna go there and spend time with them, talk to them, uh, see what they need and help them, you know.

However, he did explain that not all Chamoru families maintain this custom. He stated:

Well uh that's like what I said *nai*, there's no other way to depend on, to depend on the family. Some family, they didn't care about it. Some family, they not that close. They think that they not responsible for the parents anymore. So they are free to go anywhere they wanna go but even though, you have your own obligations to do but think of it too, that you have to have time for them, you know, and trying to find time so you could help at least something that they need.

However, participant 1 did feel that most Chamoru families still follow this custom, and he did acknowledge that some families were simply not able to care for their parents. He stated:

Yeah, I think still that a majority of that, on that culture. There's very few that some of the parents, that the children turn in their parents to the another place. There's some reason why they did that too because they unable to do it. Because they working and they uh, family do, and they have difficult time to do it, and that's the reason why, especially if they know that they have a program that uh, a place for nurse that you know, pre-care and all that, I say that's a good place to put them „cause I won't be able to give that kind of service. Those kind of families. I understand that. That's the reason why some of them are doing that. But the rest, most likely, they have the time if they not working, and they have the time, and you know, and they uh, they doing pretty good so those are the parents, those are the children who go there…They have enough money, and they're the one who gonna come around and help.

Participant 2 explained the custom as follows:

It goes back to the family *nai*. Some families are very strict, and others are not too close. But if you're close, you should visit with your parents and call them, talk to them sometimes just to see how they are, and if they are OK, and if they need anything, help. Chamoru custom, you always help the *manåmko'* and takes care of them. Now it's hard, „cause everyone is very busy with work. But the culture it's changed.

Participant 5 shared the following narrative about this custom and how times are

changing:

> Right now the custom of the younger ones is very different. They are not like us,
> I mean, older ones, that we really take care of our families. But now these
> younger ones, they're not really close. They'll come and say, hi and goodbye.
> But not because, I can like I said, I see some of my, the younger ones *nai*, and I
> learn to, I experience that because my sister's grandkids, when their grandpa, my
> brother-in-law was sick, they don't come around and…it was me, my daughter,
> my son that go and baby sit at the hospital. Not my sister's grandkids. They
> never, not even the son-in-law, not even the real daughter. Yeah, it all depends,
> and it all depends on how they live their life. Because to me *nai* my son, my
> youngest boy, when his dad was sick, I tell you, everyday he'll come to give his
> dad shower. I never shower his dad. He's the one that change his pampers and
> you know change him, and I said no never mind now that I'm taking care of him,
> I'll change him. But no, he'll come morning and evening to come and take him to
> the place, even when it's up there at the nursing, at the hospital, my son, he's the
> one that cleans his dad. I don't know about others. But myself, I can tell that hey,
> my kids are close.

When families were not able to live with or close to their aging parents,

participants 3 and 4 felt that it was important that the children maintain communication

with their parents. Participant 3 stated: "Yeah, to come and visit, you know. To be with,

you know, for what. Not just visit but pick up the phone and say hey, how are you? You

know like that." Participant 4 stated: "They should listen to their parents and older

siblings…the elders because they will give you good advice to help you in your life." In

the following final section, the participants' outlook on life will be discussed

<div align="center">Area 7: OUTLOOK ON LIFE</div>

The goal of this section was to simply identify and understand the things that still

give meaning and happiness to the participants at that point in their life. Most of the

participants attributed their happiness to having their family and God in their life.

Participant 1 gave the following account:

Well uh, I've been married for 60 years, and I'm still have the same partner and we still happy. Me happy, she happy, I'm happy and we enjoying life. And uh, I'm happy „cause I could see my children around you know and, I'm able to see them even though I live this long, so I'm able to see them, great-grandchildren and all that. Some people they don't even see one. You know, they got nothing. So it all depends you know, but there's always another way to find for yourself, to do something for yourself. So that's part of our happiness is to get yourself, you know, make sure you prepare yourself, get something of what you need in the future coming. Don't wait for the future to come to you, you come to the future. Because that future, if you don't go for the future, it will never come to you. So when you go for the future, that future will come to you because you go there. And you prepare for many years and then you reach that goal, you got it made. The rest is your happiness.

Participant 2 stated that the two most important things in his life were to keep his father's trade alive, and to ensure that his wife was provided for when he dies. The following is his account:

The most important thing is to keep my father's trade alive. To carry on and preserve my father's trade that I promised to keep it alive until I'm down to earth that I cannot do it no more, and then that's it. But um, that's the whole thing, that's the part is to keep, and you know, try to uh, see that the, if I gone first before my wife, you know, I wanna make sure that my wife is taken care. Not my children „cause they have their own family. But I want my wife to be taken care, if I'm gone first. And that's the two most important thing. To keep this alive and to see that my wife was taken care of when I go, gone first.

Participant 3 simply stated that the things that brought her happiness were "My children, my loving, and my church. What more can I ask." Participant 4 had the following to say about the things that still brought her happiness in her life:

It makes me happy to see that my children are not sick, that they continue to pray and are doing good. And if I go before them that they won't forget what I said to pray. Pray all the time. Just like those who passed away before me like my mother. I am doing what they did because I didn't forget what they said to me. I remember that they told me to pray. When I got married my father said to me: „That no matter if you are rich or poor don't ever forget God.

Participant 5 stated the following things that gave importance to her life:

Right now my health is what I am, I'm, is important. I have to take care of myself because I still have you know, like I said, I still have grandkids that I wanna see

when I grow older because *esta* I'm ready I said if the lord will take me already I am OK. I'm fine. But what I wanna is if the Lord can give me a longer life just to see my three little ones, I have three little ones, the rest are all grown up. This one I'm raising up (her grandson) is already going on nineteen so he can take care of himself. I told him already you don't have to worry because the house, the place where we're staying is gonna be for you to stay, live here, it's gonna be yours. But you have to help yourself to pay the power, the water because if you don't have money, no power, no water. That's my happiness now. Is not, like I said, I'm getting old already. There's not, I'm not gonna go out and work and make money, extra money now no more. I'm satisfied with what I have. As long as I can pay all the power, the water, the bills. That's it! I don't wanna, I don't need to be rich (laughing). To have plenty money now, I don't need it. There's nothing, I'm not gonna buy anything. Hey, well maybe whatever odds and ends I can that one but I'm not gonna be *uyu* luxury time, no. My house is paid off, I don't pay for the house. I'm satisfied with what I have. I eat okay. So as long as I have little to pay for, just the bills. I know my husband left me with his debt but I'm paying, I said sooner or later it'll be paid off. That's it. Nothing to worry about. No I don't worry anymore. I'm happy with what I have.

Participant 6 shared that his happiness was that he was still alive, and that his family was around him. He stated: "You know, at least everyone's healthy. Not more than that…and healthy you know, put it, turn to God…nothing more." The participants all shared a continuous message of being satisfied with what they had. They did not speak of material things or money, they were truly happy with simply having their family around, and they were thankful to God for being able to live that long with their family.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

By focusing on seven key areas in the lives of the 6 participants: 1) the Chamoru concept of *mesngon*, 2) religion, 3) coping strategies, 4) conceptions of death and dying, 5) suicide, 6) social support, and 7) outlook on life, this research was able to highlight some of the participants' important sources of personal strengths found within the value systems of Chamoru culture, their religious commitments, and social support networks that work together to protect the Chamoru *manåmko'* (elders) from self destructive

behaviors such as suicide, resulting in the almost non-existent suicide rates among the *manåmko'* population of Guahan. This chapter will begin with a discussion of these protective sources, an overview of suicide, then with a discussion of an emerging theory, followed by a discussion of the limitations of this study, some implications for future research, and finally, with a discussion of some implications for clinical practice.

<center>*Mesngon*: To Survive Against All Odds</center>

This study provided rich insights into the strengths of Chamoru culture from the psychological, spiritual, and social levels of the *manåmko'*. On the psychological level, the Chamoru value of *mesngon* laid the solid foundation upon which a Chamoru person could look within oneself to find a constant source of strength to persevere and overcome any of life's hardships and the most impossible of odds. This source of "toughness" that was explained in detail in the previous chapter provided the physical and mental stamina for Chamoru survival. As explained by the participants, this value of *mesngon* was instilled in them at a very young age and remained with them throughout their entire life.

Although this study revealed some uncertainty about the verbal transmission of the value of *mesngon* in everyday Chamoru conversation, on the other hand, it was clear that the participants, at young ages, became well aware of and learned this important value from directly observing their parents who were role-modeling the qualities needed for survival. Their parents exemplified the tough attitude that was needed to provide for a family, the many necessary and difficult sacrifices that would have to be made, the importance of patience and remaining steadfast especially during difficult times, and the necessity of humility during the good and bad times in life. The fact that the concept of *mesngon* has been able to persist and be transmitted intergenerationally despite four

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hundred years of colonial oppression and great cultural upheaval demonstrates the importance and powerful role that *mesngon* has served in the survival of Chamoru culture and its people to overcome tremendous hardships.

For being such a powerful word that elicits feelings and images of enduring tremendous hardships and making difficult personal sacrifices, it is very interesting that *mesngon* also evokes the necessity of possessing great humility. For the *manåmko'*, it seems that the ability to remain humble and recognize the importance of remaining humble in spite of facing great hardships and sacrifice may very well be the key quality that enables Chamoru *manåmko'* to remain *mesngon* and not give up. As participant 3 stated, "That's the key word for *mesngon*…you cannot be *mesngon* if you're not humble." The great musician, Bob Marley stated, "Every man thinks that his burden is the heaviest." Perhaps this is what the *manåmko'* understand about enduring hardships and sacrifices in life. Every person experiences hardships and sacrifices at some point in his or her own life. To give up and say that his or her own hardships are too great when compared to the next person is not a view that the *manåmko'* accept. To them everyone's hardships are in sense equal in nature because hardships arise in everyone's life despite the fact that the actual hardship may manifest itself in different ways. As participant 6 simply remarked, God does not discriminate. Therefore, by recognizing and accepting that everyone has to face their own hardships and sacrifices at some point in their lifetime, the *manåmko'* have understood the value of humbling their hearts when enduring such situations, which therefore enables them to remain *mesngon*, not give up, and survive against all odds.

Along with having strong personal role-models, the participants themselves experienced firsthand the hard work and sacrifice that their parents made as they followed in their parents' footsteps and contributed to the intensive labor entailed in subsistence living, and endured with their parents along with other relatives and friends the extreme hardships that were forced upon them as victims of WWII and its aftermath. All of these qualities and experiences served to groom the participants at such a young age to be *mesngon* for the rest of their lives because to be *mesngon* meant survival for them and for their families. This was why the participants stressed that *mesngon* was especially visible in the act of being a caregiver for a sick family member. There was no bigger hardship and personal sacrifice to be made than committing to the care of a sick loved one. Only personal acts such as being a caregiver to a loved one that demonstrated enormous sacrifice, patience, toughness, and perseverance deserved the recognition of being *mesngon*. This was why participant 6 expressed that *mesngon* is a powerful word that is not to be used lightly.

<div align="center">God is Everything and Everything is God</div>

On a spiritual level, the religious commitment found among the Chamoru participants showed a deep devotion to God. For the participants, God is the ultimate source of their strength. To them God is everything, and everything comes from God. As was stressed constantly by the participants, without God they would have no life, there would be nothing for them. Throughout the study, whenever problems or hardships arose in their lives, they constantly voiced that praying to God was the answer to all of life's difficulties, especially during the most desperate of times. They believed that God was with them at all times and was always there to help see them through the difficult

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times. Participant 4 expressed that you prayed to God to guide you through the difficult times. She explained that you did not pray to ask God to take away the hardships, instead you prayed to God to help you to see and stay the path that will lead you to overcome that obstacle. For the participants, if you believe in God, trust in him, and remain steadfast in faith, God will be there to help you overcome all obstacles.

The participants also repeatedly expressed that they prayed to God not only during the hard times but they made sure to thank him during the good times. No matter what, they set aside time each day to pray to God, and despite physical limitations, they remained committed in their own ways to contribute to their religious community and observed the Sabbath day. To the participants, death was nothing to be feared. They faced death many times in WWII, when a spouse died, or when they were diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses such as heart disease and cancer. Because of their belief in God and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, they believed that life was only temporary and death was not the end. As participant 1 stated, all life is temporary, whether it be "short term temporary or long term temporary." The participants all believed that when a person dies, it is ultimately due to God's will and his master plan.

For the Chamoru *manåmko'*, *mesngon* and a strong faith in God went hand-in-hand. Together they served as a continual powerful source of mental, physical, and spiritual strength. As the center of their personal strength, when things feel so desperate and impossible in their lives, the *manåmko'* are able to constantly draw upon more of this personal and spiritual strength in order to survive the most incredible odds such as WWII, experiencing the death of a spouse, or facing a life-threatening illness or a series of illnesses.

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Interestingly, the cultural qualities that comprise *mesngon* mirror the same qualities that are found in being a faithful Christian. Just as the participants' parents role-modeled the qualities of being a *mesngon* person, the life of Jesus Christ also served as a model for being *mesngon*. As participants 1 and 2 stated, Jesus suffered and died to save his people. For the participants, the life of Jesus exemplified qualities of enduring hardships, remaining steadfast in faith, having patience, perseverance, sacrifice, and humility. To the participants, no amount of suffering and sacrifice that they experienced in their own lives could ever compare to the suffering and sacrifice that Jesus endured for his people. This is why participant 4 who was the eldest of the participants (94-years old) emphasized that you have to be *mesngon* no matter what, and you have to always pray to God and never forget him, whether you may be rich or poor because God will always be there to help you. With such a strong psychological and spiritual foundation, it is no wonder how the participants were able to endure so much in their lifetime and still continue to go on and fight for survival and not resort to self-destructive behaviors such as suicide.

<center>Social Support Networks in Chamoru Culture</center>

The child's obligation to the parents

On the social level, this study was able to identify important social support systems that are present in Chamoru culture. The most important of these support systems is the family. In Chamoru culture, everything is centered upon the family's well-being and familial obligations to each other. The typical Chamoru family is structured in such a way that when parents become elderly, the family is there to support its aging members. The older a person is the more respect is bestowed unto that person

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(Cunningham, 1992). Because of that respect and value for one's elders, it is customary for adult children to care for their aging parents. Usually the elder parent(s) live in the home of one of their adult children, or the adult child lives in the home of his or her parent(s). All of the participants in this study with the exception of participant 2 (his grandson lived with him and his wife) lived with at least one of their adult children. According to the Guam Census (2000) 16.1% or 6,247 of all family households consisted of individuals who were 65 years and older.

Aside from the child's obligation to his or her parents, Chamoru culture also calls for the same obligation of the god-child to care for his or her god-parent(s) in the event that the god-parent(s) is sickly and old, and had no children to care for them. Although this Chamoru custom may not be widely practiced as it was during the time of the participants' generation, it serves as yet another example of the value that the Chamoru people place on their elders and another way that Chamoru culture provides additional support networks to ensure the care of the *manåmko'* who are the bearers of knowledge and wisdom in Chamoru society.

Proximity

Contributing to this family design, most Chamoru families live in their own family compound, which promotes frequent social interaction between family members due to this close proximity. With the exception of participant 2, every participant lived in their respective family compound. This made it extremely easy for the *manåmko'* to find help from their family whenever they needed it. As participant 3 stated, if one family member was not available, then more than likely another family member would be able to help out. This close proximity created a positive atmosphere that encouraged the

family to be continuously engaged with their elders, which undoubtedly helped the *manåmko'* cope well with life stressors. In the case of participant 2 who did not live in a family compound, his grandson was there living with him, and so he was still very much connected and engaged with some part of his family on a daily basis, and could rely on that extra support from his grandson whenever he needed it. Furthermore, the actual geography of Guahan makes it an ideal environment for supporting the *manåmko'*. Guahan has a total landmass of only 212 square miles. Even when family members have spread out from their respective family compounds, no Chamoru family actually lives more than an hour away from each other. Also, with modern telecommunications available on Guahan, families are no further than a phone call away, even if family members were living off-island.

Always ready, always available

Although the participants were all adamant about making sure that they were not a burden to their adult children who were now responsible for the well-being of their own families, whether they asked for it or not, the participants always found themselves surrounded by their family during times of need. During times of major illness or the death of a spouse, the participants all described how their children, their grandchildren, or some other extended family relative were there to offer prayers and support for them. Participant 3 remarked that so many extended family members came to her hospital room when she had a heart attack; she found it difficult to rest. Even when illnesses required seeking medical attention in Hawaii or in the U.S. mainland, despite very costly travel expenses, the *manåmko'* still found themselves accompanied by at least one or more of their children.

Even in somber situations like funerals, Chamoru culture encourages social support by bringing together families, extended families, and friends so that they can connect with each other to pray, mourn, and laugh together. Chamoru funerals are actually more like major social events and it is not uncommon to see crowds of people attending a funeral of an "ordinary" person who was not a politician or local celebrity. As was articulated by participant 5, she was shocked to see so many people such as her old coworkers come together and pay their respects at her husband's funeral, even though the funeral announcement was only advertised in the local newspaper for a few short days. Furthermore, the Chamoru custom of giving *chenchule'* in the form of gifts, money, or labor provides other tangible ways that Chamorus offer help to families and friends during times of need. Especially in the event of a funeral, *chenchule'* is welcomed because as participant 5 stated, it's very expensive to have a funeral.

With a strong personal foundation built upon the value of *mesngon* and faith in God, along with the presence of auxiliary sources of familial and community support that are customary components of Chamoru culture, it becomes clear how this powerful combination works in such an effective way to protect the *manåmko'* from suicide and other self destructive behaviors. As reported by Utsey, Hook, & Stanard (2007) spirituality, extended family, and family cohesion/structure predicted positive effects against suicide. Consequently, despite the fact that the participants fell into some of the major risk factor categories that have been the focus of much research such as being a widow and experiencing recent bereavement (Bonnewyn et al., 2009), or experiencing physical illness (Grek, 2007; Marnin & Duberstein, 2005; Kjolseth, Ekeberg & Steihaug, 2010) or multiple physical illnesses (Bonnewyn et al., 2009), the participants were not

overwhelmed by the presence of these risk factors due to this rich cultural system of strength and support. This is in sharp contrast to the findings of Kjolseth et al. (2010) which reported that elderly Norwegians (65 years and older) prior to committing suicide held negative outlooks on life that were in part due to experiencing some sort of functional decline, which consequently resulted in viewing their lives as a burden, and death as a welcomed relief.

So when the *manåmko'* were able to, they would overcome obstacles themselves by remaining *mesngon*. When things were too difficult to handle on their own, they could rely on familial and community support to come together to give that extra push to persevere, and above all, they had God with them always to provide that constant source of strength and guidance. Furthermore, the availability of those aforementioned supports helped to shape the positive outlook that each of the participants shared about their lives. It is no wonder that the participants attributed their happiness and meaning in life to God and their family. The very fact that these *manåmko'* were approaching a century in age at the time of the study despite experiencing such enormous tragedy and hardships in their lives gives testament to the positive protective factors that can be found in Chamoru culture.

<div align="center">Overview of Suicide in the Lives of Chamoru Elders</div>

Low incidence

Taking a closer examination of suicide in the lives of the *manåmko'*, we know that suicide was a rare phenomenon when they were growing up on Guahan. Only a few participants could recall rare reports of suicide in their early years. It was not until a few decades ago that they became aware of a suicide problem on Guahan. This recent

awareness could be attributed in large part to the very public media coverage of the

suicide of the late governor Ricky Bordallo that occurred on January 31, 1992.

Governor Bordallo was a well loved and respected leader of the Chamoru people.

Participant 6 shared that governor Bordallo was a brilliant man and the only governor that

ever fully dedicated his career to fighting for the rights of the Chamoru people. He went

on to share that Governor Bordallo was a wealthy man who gave up all of his wealth to

serve the disadvantaged Chamoru people that he loved, which undoubtedly increased his

legitimacy among the people. Participant 4 shared fond memories of Governor Bordallo

and declared that he was a very good man. So when Governor Bordallo shot himself in

broad daylight at the Chief Kepua statue located off the busy Marine Corp. Drive

highway in the capital of Hagåtña, the community was in quite a shock. Governor

Bordallo's death was the first suicide to garner front page public attention.

Stigma of suicide?

Prior to Governor Bordallo's death, open public discussion and reporting of

suicide was avoided. His extensively publicized death single-handedly brought down all

previous "taboos" of discussing suicide openly. Subsequently, suicide is no longer a

"taboo" subject for the local media. However, it is important to note that media agencies,

such as the Pacific Daily News (PDN), Guahan's most notable newspaper agency, do

practice ethical restraint in regards to suicide deaths. The PDN does not publicize suicide

as the cause of death unless it is deemed "news worthy," according to the managing

editor of the PDN, David Crisostomo. News worthy situations would involve high

profile community members such as Governor Bordallo or situations that have a great

impact on the local community. The prior avoidance of suicide was attributed in large

part to the Catholic Church's condemnation of suicide. The Catholic Church was and still is the dominant religious institution on Guahan. With suicide classified as a mortal sin, official Church policy denied the victim of last rights, rosaries, and burial eligibility in a Catholic cemetery (Johnson, 2006). With such a strict policy on suicide, this Church sanctioned stigma may have had some affect on deterring suicide in the community. However, the extent of influence that this stigma had over Chamoru society is questionable. In order for a stigma to have influence in society, it must first be accepted and then upheld by the people. But when considering the information gathered from this study and from the work done by Johnson (2006), it appears that the Chamoru people did not accept this Church sanctioned stigma.

In 2006, Johnson prepared a report entitled The Stigma of Suicide for *I Pinangon*, the University of Guam's suicide prevention resource center supported by federally funded grants that explored whether a stigma for suicide existed in the community of Guahan. He proposed that whatever stigma that did exist in the community has since evolved and lost influence in today's society since the Catholic Church now grants full burial rights to suicide victims. Again, the catalyst for the change in the Church's position was due to the suicide of Governor Bordallo. As described in some detail by participant 3, Bordallo's elaborate funeral was the first of its kind to be officially authorized by the Catholic Church. The Archbishop of Guahan's Catholic Archdiocese personally officiated at the funeral and walked with Bordallo's casket from the Cathedral Basilica to the *Pigo* Catholic cemetery that was located a little over a mile away.

In Johnson's report, he highlighted a discussion he had with a University of Guam (UOG) Chamoru Studies professor and a local Chamoru woman, which called into

question the existence of a suicide stigma in the Chamoru community. In the Chamoru language, *mamåhlao* denotes a feeling of shame. But according to the UOG professor, *mamåhlao* was rarely used in reference to suicides because the Chamoru people felt compassion for the victim and the family, even though people knew that suicide was a sin. Additionally, the Chamoru woman that Johnson interviewed stated: "We know it is *isao* (sin), but no one would say it like that…the person that commits suicide is going to hell, we know it, everyone knows it...but we have compassion for the family and therefore we do not bring it up…they are hurting enough and all we can do is be compassionate toward them to lessen the blow of this terrible act."

Interestingly, the responses collected from this study lent credibility to Johnson's findings. All of the participants (keeping in mind that four of them were Catholic and two were Seventh Day Adventist) expressed that they felt suicide victims should be given a proper Christian burial. The participants provided further evidence that questioned the existence of a stigma towards suicide in Chamoru society as they all expressed that there was no actual Chamoru word for suicide. All they could share were phrases that simply described the act. For example, participant 3 stated that when a person committed suicide you would say, *añaka gue* ("he hang himself"), *ñaka* means to hang, or Ha *puno* gue ("he kill himself"), *puno'* means kill. Participant 6 also shared the same phrases, Un *puno' hao* ("you kill yourself") or *Un ñaka' hao* ("you hang yourself"). These phrases simply describe the action performed in the situation and do not imply any deeper meanings. For example, the word *mamåhlao* means more than just feeling embarrassed or ashamed for one's action(s). It elicits feelings of disgracing and dishonoring one's entire family. Considering these facts, we then have to question the motivation behind the people's

need to keep suicides secretive. As participant 6 stated, suicide was considered some kind of a scandal. It seems highly likely that the Chamoru people felt the need to keep suicides secretive because it was a defiant act of family preservation against Church authority. Suicide was already a terrible sudden tragedy. But imagine being denied burial rights for one's son or daughter, and the chance to lay the victim to rest so that some closure and healing could begin in the family.   When family is the center of Chamoru society, and funerals are such major events that bring the community together, being denied burial rights in the presence of the community only serves to further exacerbate the tragic event. Also in desperate times, it seems likely that some people were left with no choice but to defy Church sanctions in order to preserve the family's well-being and try to find some peace of mind by keeping the suicide secretive in order to be allowed burial rights. Keeping suicides a secret also helped to eliminate outright conflict between the family and Church authority. Such conflict would have definitely brought about feelings of *mamåhlao*. Families in these situations are just looking for compassion and prayers, not judgment and condemnation from the Church, as they try to heal and make sense of this tragedy. It would be more helpful to the family if everyone, including the Church would just leave judgment alone with God.

So considering the evidence from this study and Johnson's findings, it seems plausible to make three conclusions: 1) that a stigma towards suicide may have never existed in Chamoru society because the people rejected such an insensitive Church doctrine, or 2) if a stigma did exist in the Chamoru community, it was accepted by only a small minority of the people, or 3) the weakly-or occasionally-accepted stigma completely evolved and eventually lost the little influence it had in society as a result of

the Church changing its position, and simply due to the changing times just as Chamoru

society is now accepting of having children out of wedlock although the Church still

frowns upon it. But no matter which conclusion turns out to be more valid, all of these

positions demonstrate how human compassion in Chamoru society triumphs over strict

and insensitive religious doctrine that consequently renders any form of institutional

stigma ineffective. Furthermore, the participants justified their point of view because

they all believed that ultimately, God is the only one who can pass judgment on people,

not the Church institution.

Suicide causation and preventive interventions

As stated in the previous chapter, the participants shared a range of causes for

suicide such as mental illness (namely insanity) which was brought upon by having too

much stress in one's life, a lack of faith in God, problems in the family, a lack of

communication and closeness between parent and child, and population size, which has

ushered in a cultural melting pot of different values and ideologies. These are all very

reasonable and concrete examples of things that could happen in a person's life.

Likewise the practical preventative interventions that the participants felt could be

effective in helping protect young people from committing suicide simply drew upon the

sources of strength and social support systems that played influential roles in their own

lives. Simply talking to the youth, showing them support and that you cared for them,

encouraging them to continue on with their life, and to not be afraid to talk openly with

their parents about their problems are very much in line with the support that family and

community members gave to the participants during their times of need. Always as the

underlying solution to any problems, the participants encouraged the youth to go to

Church and pray to God, and even talk to a priest. They even encouraged the youth to utilize mental health professionals who possessed the expertise to help them.

<center>Bringing It All Together</center>

We can say with much confidence that any cultural and religious stigmas towards suicide had little influence on the low suicide rates found in the Chamoru *manåmko'* population because human compassion has triumphed over strict doctrines. In fact, these stigmas may have never truly existed in Chamoru society. We also know that suicide was not prevalent in this generation of Chamorus, and that the interventions that the participants suggested could help suicidal youths were basically the same components of the values and support systems that have helped them in their own lives. Therefore, we must acknowledge that the cultural design built within Chamoru society over 4,000 years ago (according to Guampedia.com, archaeological evidence has indicated that the Chamoru people have settled Guahan and the Mariana Islands for over 4,000 years) has continued to protect its people by laying the healthy foundation for psychological, spiritual, and social well-being through the synthesis of the cultural value of *mesngon*, religious devotion, and the many social support networks that all worked together to help the Chamoru people persevere and survive against all odds.

Emerging Theory: Linking Cultural Erosion and High Youth Suicide Rates

Now that we have an understanding of some of the major positive factors present in Chamoru culture that have helped the *manåmko'* thrive despite incredible odds, we must turn our attention to the high suicide rates that are present among the Chamoru youth and young adults of Guahan. According to the DMHSA (2009) from the years 2000 to 2007, 21% of all suicides were completed by those who between the ages of 10

and 19, and 38% of completed suicides were found to be among those aged 20 to 29. In all, those people younger than 30 years-old made up roughly 60% of all completed suicides. Compare that data to the 3% of completed suicides found in the 60 to 69-year old age bracket and only 1% for the 70+ age bracket for those same years. So what is missing in the lives of these young Chamorus? Are the same knowledge and values that are found in the *manåmko'* generation present in these younger generations?

Current trends are showing that the younger generations of Chamorus have become more and more estranged from their cultural roots. This is most apparent in the rampant language deficiency that is found in the younger generation of Chamorus. Of the eighteen *manåmko'* that Barusch and Spaulding (1989) interviewed, 78% of them indicated that their grandchildren could not speak Chamoru. According Barusch and Spaulding, a major consequence of this language gap is the limited transmission of values and family history. In a study by Perez (2005), interviewees expressed their awareness of the erosion of Chamoru culture and the inability of teenagers to speak and understand the Chamoru language. In a 2005 presentation entitled, Language Maintenance: The Case of Guam, Marilyn C. Salas, PhD. stressed that most fluent Chamoru speakers are 60-year old and above, and that the Chamorus between the ages of 40-50 have limited use of Chamoru or simply do not use the language. Her major concern was that if parents are not transmitting the Chamoru language, who then was going to pass the language onto their children. In his blog post entitled, *The State of Chamorro Language* (2006), local scholar, Michael Lujan Bevacqua, PhD. explained that the Guam Census (2000) data which indicated that 22% of the people on Guam are fluent in the Chamoru language is actually an inflated number. Having conducted his own Chamoru language surveys he

noticed that people were most likely to say they were fluent in the Chamoru language because they simply understood a few words but really had limited mastery of the language itself.

Marcus Garvey, who was one of the great African leaders of the early 19th century, once said: "A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots." So too are the younger generations of Chamorus if they not able to communicate directly in the language of their elders, and learn from their experiences such as how they dealt with challenges in their own lives. How are the youth supposed to gain a deep understanding of unique Chamoru values and concepts, and be aware of and carry on those important values such as *mesngon* if they cannot speak and understand their native language?

With grounded theory as the major basis of this study, it is therefore theorized that the high suicide rates found in the younger generations of Chamorus is due to the continual disconnection and estrangement that these young Chamorus are experiencing with their cultural identity due to their severe loss of language proficiency, which is the primary factor. Today's youth and young adults need to be securely grounded in their culture so that they can recognize that they can turn to their elders as sources of wisdom and inspiration.   Their elders should be their primary role-models because the knowledge and wisdom found in Chamoru culture has proven itself over 4,000 years to possess key elements for survival. The rich life experiences of Chamoru elders are shining examples of perseverance, faith, family and community that need to be continually instilled in the lives of young Chamorus. The youth need to understand that they can always fall back on their culture, their faith, and their elders when they need guidance and encouragement

during times of frustration and hardships. They need to remember and understand that no matter what hardships they are facing, their grandparents and elders before them have also overcome so much adversity, which ultimately means that they do not need to turn to drugs, violence, suicide, or other self-destructive behaviors to deal with stress and hardships. All they need to do is simply listen to the wisdom of their elders to persevere and find solutions to problems in their own lives. The *manåmko'* are living testaments that the Chamoru people can survive against all odds.

It is beyond the limits of this study to discuss the deep and complex issues that have lead to the decline and devaluation of the Chamoru language. However, a recognition of the devastating effects of colonialism and the social inequalities, the poverty, the stark audacity of the U.S. in perpetuating social and political injustices that have continued to disempower and divide the Chamoru people, and the unresolved trauma that has been transmitted intergenerationally by some families (Rapadas, 2007) cannot and must not ever be ignored, hidden away, or forgotten. This cold harsh reality must continue to be at the forefront of all social ills that are plaguing present-day Chamoru society because the root causes of the social problems on Guahan originate from political inequality and injustices. Unless these underlying social issues are immediately resolved, social ills and symptomatic problems such as suicide, substance abuse, crime, family violence, and poverty, will continue to plague Chamoru society for generations to come.

<div align="center">Limitations of the Study</div>

There are five major limitations of this study: 1) its sample size, 2) language, 3) cross-validation, 4) the difficulty with analyzing suicide from non-suicidal participants,

and 5) the different approach of this study than in previous studies on Guahan.   First, a

small sample size of only 6 participants automatically places limitations on the study's

strength.   A larger sample size would give more strength and credibility to the evidence

found in this study, and could have uncovered other important cultural values and

components that would shed light into the positive elements of Chamoru culture.

Secondly, this study was conducted completely in English. Chamoru is the first language

of the participants and English is their second language. It is no doubt that because the

interviews were not conducted in their native language, other key factors could have been

missed due to the nature of translating Chamoru concepts into the English language.

There are certainly limitations in the English language that prevent it from accurately

capturing the deeper meanings found in the Chamoru language. Also, in the case of

participant 4, a translator was needed to mediate the interview. This undoubtedly limited

the researchers control over the direction of the interview due to the possibility of

mistranslations and misinterpretations.

Third, due to constraints on the availability of the participants, the researcher was

unable to arrange follow-up interviews to ensure highlighted themes were exactly what

the participants were trying to express. But because the interviews averaged two hours in

length, with the exception of participant 4 whose interview lasted only one hour due to

her age, the rich detailed descriptions found in each interview helped to offset the

inability to conduct follow-up interviews. Also, the incorporation of third-party screeners

to assist in the identification of themes could have helped increase the strength of this

study.

Fourth, there are inherent difficulties with studying suicide. Victims are not able to be interviewed to understand the exact conditions and reasons for their choice. This places limitations on attributing identified risk factors as exact causes of suicide. Furthermore, as this study focused on understanding suicide from non-suicidal participants, the implications put forth in study are also inherently weak and need further research to validate the findings of this study.

Lastly, this study was the first of its kind to be conducted on Guahan. To the best of the researcher's knowledge of the current literature and current programs and studies on Guahan, no other suicide studies have been approached in this manner. Therefore, lacking the ability to model similar research on Guahan weakens the study to some extent. But by setting a precedent for this kind of research, future studies are encouraged to use this approach to focus on validating these findings and to uncover other positive factors that could help the understanding of low suicide rates in populations, which will simultaneously aid in finding solutions to high suicide rates. These preliminary findings are just a starting point and need more validation over time.

Implications for Future Research

Future researchers are encouraged to replicate this study in order to preserve and build the capacity for indigenous knowledge and wisdom in solving local problems. Future studies should test the theoretical implication of this study in both qualitative and quantitative approaches so that there is a rich balance between qualitative and empirical evidence. More studies should focus on the positive protective factors against suicide in order to remedy the absence of comparable research using this approach so that there can be a well-balanced comparison with the many studies on suicide risk factors. Research

also needs to determine if the younger generations of Chamorus are learning their language and the values that are so important in the lives of Chamoru elders. If research shows that they are learning their language and the important values in Chamoru culture, then new research needs to focus its energy on understanding other reasons for their susceptibility to suicide. But if research presents strong evidence that the Chamoru youth and young adults are not learning their language and are thus consequently losing their understanding of key values such as *mesngon*, research, therapeutic interventions, and treatment modalities need to capitalize on implementing the wisdom possessed by Chamoru elders to help solve psycho-social problems in the Chamoru community. Also, one of the major draw backs of the DMHSA study, *Profile on Suicide*, is that it did not compare age and ethnicity in regards to suicide trends. Future research needs to focus on exploring this aspect of suicide on Guahan as it will serve to identify exactly what ethnic groups are at risk or protected based upon the relationship between age and ethnicity. New theories may emerge from addressing the lack of knowledge in that area.

<center>Implications for Clinical Practice</center>

The indigenous psychology approach that has been modeled in this study, is based upon the belief that all cultures possess unique traditions and wisdom that help their communities deal with various kinds of problematic situations encountered in daily life, and that the goal of indigenous psychology is to construct those various systems of knowledge based on folk wisdom in order to help those indigenous communities solve their daily problems more efficiently (Hwang, 2010). All mental health practitioners need to focus on recognizing and utilizing the local cultural wisdom of their respective communities in order to build and maintain culturally sensitive and appropriate ways of

understanding so that treatment interventions can be effectively tailored to the cultural needs of the local environment. The thousands of years of indigenous wisdom present in Chamoru culture cannot be discredited and should be the foundation for all treatment modalities and interventions. Present mental health institutions and all mental health practitioners on Guahan need to incorporate and capitalize on this local wisdom. This will only validate their credibility and utility from the communities they seek to serve.

Conclusion

All future local researchers of Guahan are encouraged to continue to focus on using, building, and preserving indigenous knowledge as the means to help solve the societal ills that are present today. All Chamoru scholars are encouraged to carry on the knowledge, wisdom, and traditions of our elders throughout all their future endeavors, especially those focused on helping the younger generations of Chamorus today. The youth need to be instilled with the values of their elders, and be encouraged to continue to value and preserve Chamoru cultural traditions as it has served its people well throughout the 4,000 years of Chamoru existence. Cultural preservation through academic research is critically important. The youth of today need to have a solid foundation in their cultural identity, just as the *manåmko'* in this study have shown through their wisdom and age the value of Chamoru culture. They need to recognize and understand the strength and confidence that exists within them all, and they need to know what it truly means to stand up and take pride in being a Chamoru man or woman. Simply put, the Chamoru youth need to believe in the value and importance of their cultural roots, which really means believing in oneself. According to the wisdom of a Chamoru proverb: *"Chaddek basnak i tai hinengge!"* Those with no belief fall quickly.

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Appendix A

Table A

Demographic Information of Participants

	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Religion	Marital Status	Years Lived on Guahan
Participant 1	88	Male	Chamoru	Catholic	Married	80
Participant 2	91	Male	Chamoru	SDA	Married	91
Participant 3	80	Female	Chamoru	Catholic	Married	80
Participant 4	94	Female	Chamoru	Catholic	Widow	64
Participant 5	71	Female	Chamoru	SDA	Widow	71
Participant 6	83	Male	Chamoru	Catholic	Married	83

Appendix B

Table B

Demographic Information of Participants

	Years Married	Children	Education	Profession	Yearly Income	Living Situation	Household
Participant 1	60	5	9	Heavy Equipment Foreman	$44,000	Own Home	3
Participant 2	61	5	12	Immigration Officer	< $30,000	Own Home	3
Participant 3	60	5	12	Library Assistant	$44,000	Own Home	3
Participant 4	22	8	3	House Wife	NONE	Daugther's Home	3
Participant 5	51	3	12	Clerk Typist	$13,000	Own Home	2
Participant 6	63	6	10	Aircraft Mechanic	< $30,000	Own Home	4

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Demographic information

1. What ethnicity do you identify with?

2. Were you born on Guam? If not, where were you born?

3. How many years have you lived on Guam?

4. How old are you?

5. Marital status: Are you Single? Married? Divorced? Widowed? Common-law?

6. How many children do you have?

7. Socio-economic status: What is the highest education you have achieved? What was your profession before retirement? What is your average household income?

8. Living situation (own home, with children, nursing home): How many people live with you? Who are the people living with you? Do you live in a nursing home or an assisted living community?

Chamoru culture and the concept of *mesngon*

1. Are you familiar with the Chamoru word *Mesngon*? What does *Mesngon* mean to you?

2. Please describe a situation or situations that best explains the appropriate use for this word.

3. Is this a word that you have heard commonly expressed when you were growing up? If yes, how did your parents, grandparents, relatives, or friends use this word?

4. What were some of the common situations or places that you heard your family, relatives, or friends use the word *Mesngon*? For example, at parties, funerals, church, etc.

5. Does *Mesngon* have any meaning in your life?

6. Is this a word that you still hear commonly used today? If so, please give examples of the circumstances or situations that you have heard the word *Mesngon* being used today.

Religion

1. What is your religion?

2. How are you currently practicing your faith? How often do you attend church/religious services?

3. How are you currently involved in church functions? For example, fiesta celebrations, fund raisers, bible reading groups, etc.

4. Please explain your daily or weekly prayer routines. For example, do you pray when you wake up in the morning and before you go to bed? Do you say the rosary? Do you say the novena?

5. Why is praying important to you? And what are the things that you pray for?

6. Do you feel that your religious faith has helped you in your life? How has it helped you? Can you tell me about some situations that really showed you that God has blessed you because of your prayers and belief in him?

Coping Strategies

1. How do you usually cope or handle problems or tragedies that happen in life? Individually (never, some, most, or all the time)? Collectively i.e. with spouse,

relative, children, friends, priest, etc. (some, most, or all the time)?

A. If the participant has loss a spouse, child, or "close friend" (someone you have known for 10 years):

1. Have you ever in your lifetime experienced the death of a spouse, child, or "close friend"? (If the participant answers "NO" skip item set A and move to item set B)

2. Who was the person who passed away?

3. When did you lose your family member?

4. What was the cause of your family member's passing?

5. What were some of the thoughts and feelings you were experiencing at that time?

6. Did those thoughts and feeling change with time? How so?

7. What were some of things you did to help you through your grieving?

8. Who were some of the people who really helped through this tough time? And how were they able to help you?

B. If the participant has survived or is surviving a major life-threatening illness:

1. What was the illness you suffered from? Or what is the illness you are currently living with?

2. How long ago did you find out about your illness?

3. How long were you sick? Or how long have you been sick?

4. What were some of the thoughts and feelings that you were experiencing when you first found out you had the illness? And did those thoughts and feeling change with time? How so?

5. What were some of things you did or are doing to help you through your illness? What were or are the things that work the best? What were or are the things that don't work?

6. Who were or are some of the people who really helped or are helping you through your illness? And how were they able to help you?

Death and dying

1. Think about the most recent funeral you have attended. What are some of the thoughts that were going through your head?

2. Why do you feel it's important to attend funerals?

3. Please describe the important things that a Chamoru must do when attending a funeral. For example, give *chenchule'*, talk to the family members who have lost a loved one, eat, and socialize.

4. Do you find yourself reflecting on the life of the person who has passed on? Do you discuss this with other friends or relatives while at the funeral?

5. Is there anything positive to look forward to when going to a funeral?

6. What are some important lessons that you have learned from the death of a family member?

Perspectives on suicide

1. When you were growing up, did you know about any suicides that happened?

2. Was suicide a common tragedy that happened during your childhood and youth?

3. Is there a Chamoru word for suicide?

4. What do you think causes a person to commit suicide? Is it a learned behavior?

5. What consequences would happen to a family who had a family member commit suicide? Would there be shame on the family?

6. What are your thoughts and feelings about whether a person who committed suicide should receive a Christian burial?

If the participant had either attempted or thought of suicide:

1. Have you ever in your lifetime attempted or thought of suicide? (If participant answers "NO" skip questions 2-6 and move to the next interview topic)

2. How long ago did you attempt or think of committing suicide? And how old were you?

3. What was going on in your life prior to the attempt? And what were some of your thoughts and feelings prior to the attempt?

4. What were your thoughts and feelings right up to the attempt?

5. Looking back now, what are some of the life lessons that you have learned?

6. How could you have handled things differently if you could go back in time with the wisdom and understanding you have now?

7. What advice can you give to the youth and others who are considering or have attempted suicide?

8. Why do you think that the Chamoru manåmko on Guam are not choosing suicide like the American *manåmko'* living in the U.S.?

Social support

1. How close by do your siblings, children, and other relatives live to you?

2. How much are you able to talk to your children, siblings, or other relatives when you have problems and need help? How do they help you, and what are the best things that they do to help you?

3. Please describe how easy it is for you to get support from your family and friends?

4. How much support do you get from your priest or other Church members? How do they provide you with support?

5. How is a Chamoru supposed to properly support the manåmko?

6. Do you feel you can give the same needed emotional and intellectual support to any of your children, siblings, relatives, and friends?

7. What advice can you give to those people who don't have any support from others?

Outlook on life

1. What are some the important things that give you meaning in life?