

**The Fourth Qualitative Research on Mental Health Conference
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Abstract Submission

Presentation Title

Historical Analysis of Suicide in Guam During the Spanish Colonial Period, 1521-1898

Abstract

The Pacific Island of Guam has seen a significant rise in suicide rates among youth and young adults, beginning in the 1970s and reaching epidemic proportions by the 1990s. Competing explanatory models have attributed suicide in Guam to biomedical factors (e.g., mental illness), psychosocial variables (e.g., family violence, interpersonal conflict), and broader sociocultural influences (e.g., westernization, modernization). While each of these perspectives makes an important contribution to our understanding of the high suicide rates observed in Guam over the past four decades, historical documents suggest that suicide in Guam may have a historical legacy that can be traced back to the 16th century. This paper presents a historical analysis of suicides in Guam documented during the Spanish colonial period from 1521 to 1898. Historical records suggest that suicide during this time may have represented both an indigenous cultural style for responding to various forms of distress, such as illness and interpersonal conflict, and also an act of resistance to Spanish colonial rule. Discussion focuses on the implications of this historical data for suicide prevention efforts in Guam and other indigenous communities, highlighting the need for prevention programs that promote self-determination and the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages and cultures.

Presenting Authors: (1) Iain K. B. Twaddle, (2) Camarin G. Meno, (3) Eunice Joy Perez

Corresponding Author: Dr. Iain K. B. Twaddle, Professor of Clinical Psychology and Micronesian Studies

Mailing Address: Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences,
University of Guam, UOG Station, Mangilao, Guam 96923, U.S.A.

Phone: 1-671-735-2882

Fax: 1-671-734-5255

Email: itwaddle@uguam.uog.edu

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