

MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS ON SUICIDE

Guam, Micronesia hold recorded suicide rate

By JENI ANN
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Guam Tribune Staff

The suicide rate in Guam and Micronesia is higher than the U.S. national average and is increasing. Yap proper has been leading with the highest rate since 1971.

According to Dr. Ann Lynn, chairperson, Sociology Department, University of Guam, in 1966-70, Palau had the highest suicide rate of 15.9 per 100,000. Since then, Yap has consistently led with 40.9 in 1971-75, 46.5 in 1976-80, and 70.5 in 1983. In actual numbers, Dr. Lynn said between 1960-83, there were 46 suicides in Ponape, 41 in Truk, 75 in Marshalls, 7 in Kosrae, 55 in Palau, 37 in Yap Proper, and 6 in the outer islands of Yap, or a total of 367 confirmed cases in Micronesia. Dr. Lynn said these figures are much higher than the overall suicide rate in the U.S.

Dr. Lynn said her students are still working on the rate in Guam but offhand, she estimates it would at least equal, if not go higher, than the overall U.S. rate.

These and other statistics on suicide can be found in a booklet soon to be published by the sociology department, UOG. The booklet will contain studies made by three UOG students: "Suicide in Micronesia" by Seberiano Barnabas, "Suicide in Guam" by Teresita Salas, and "Suicide in Paradise" by Ladd Bell, a former Peace Corps member.

The most common form of suicide, said Dr. Lynn, is by hanging, usually outdoors, from a tree branch.

Dr. Lynn said most of those who commit suicide are young men. The predominant cause, she said, has to do with the love object. A girl will tell a young man he has to wait before they can get married. Then the girl marries somebody else. The young man commits suicide.

A second cause, said Dr. Lynn, is high aspirations which come from television or by coming to Guam or the U.S. mainland.

"They come back to the island and things are different," said Dr. Lynn.

A third cause is "future shock" or the increasing namelessness, or impersonalization of communities as they become more westernized.

"People are not adjusting fast enough to the changes around them," said Dr. Lynn.

She said there are also cultural factors, such as the Japanese influence through "hara kiri", or killing one's self to save honor. Fear of failure, or to save face for themselves and their families, said Dr. Lynn, is also a factor.

People who intend to commit suicide, she said, usually threaten to do so, or give hints to others. When it comes as a surprise, it is because other people have not paid attention.

"We need more training on mental health in elementary schools. We have physical education, maybe we should have mental health education,



ALARMING SUICIDE RATE. Dr. Ann Lynn, chairperson, Sociology Department, University of Guam, holds up two studies on suicide: "Suicide in Micronesia" by Seberiano Barnabas and "Suicide in Guam" by Teresita Salas. Together with "Suicide in Paradise" by former Peace Corps volunteer Ladd Bell, the Studies will soon be published by the department.

or education on how to confront problems without putting an end to your life," said Dr. Lynn.

A study conducted by Steve Stack, she said, found that people who commit suicide in the U.S. lack church attendance and church affiliation. Another study in the 19th century by Emil Durkheim found lower rates among Roman

Catholics. Dr. Lynn said this is because of the strong teaching that the body does not belong to us and suicide is a sin. Dr. Lynn, however, cautioned against church affiliation for the sake of church affiliation. She cited the case of mass suicide by followers of Rev. Jim Jones in Guyana.

According to Dr. Lynn, the rate of suicide for the highest

age groups in the U.S. were as follows: for white males 65 years and over, 41.1 per 100,000 in 1970, 39.2 in 1979. For black males 25-34 years, 19.2 in 1970, 26.3 in 1979. For black males 65 years and over, 8.7 in 1970 and 12.9 in 1979. For white females 45-54 years, 13.5 in 1970, 11.7 in 1979. For black females 25-34 years, 5.7 for both 1970 and 1979.

May 31, 1984

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The attached paper entitled "Suicides in Paradise" was written as a research paper for Dr. Rebecca Stephenson and her class in Cross-Cultural Problems in Guam and Micronesia at the University of Guam, Anthropology Department.

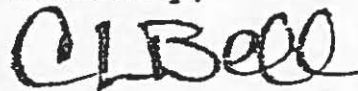
I am a former Peace Corps Volunteer who served three years on Falalus, Woleai Atoll, Yap outer islands with the first group of Volunteers to arrive in Micronesia in 1966. I have maintained my interest in the islands since that time and am currently a graduate student at the University of Guam pursuing a masters degree in Behavioral Science (emphasis psychology).

At the outset of my research - which was conducted during the spring semester of Academic year 82-83 - I was truly concerned and puzzled by the reports of a high suicide rate among Trukese youths. In the course of my tape recorded interviews with several Trukese students on campus at the University of Guam, I feel that I gained considerable insight into the problem.

If any of the information contained in this paper is of use or interest to you, please feel free to make use of it. I would be very honored if you were to cite my research in your own writings.

I only hope that better understanding of the problem will somehow lead to solution(s).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "CL Bell", with a stylized, cursive-like flourish.

CURTIS LADD BELL

SUICIDES IN PARADISE
Curtis Ladd Bell^②

The New York Times
Sunday, March 6, 1983

MICRONESIA'S MALE SUICIDE RATE DEFIES SOLUTION

In the Micronesian Islands, young men are killing themselves at one of the highest rates in the world, researchers say, and no one knows what to do about it. Suicide among males between the ages of 15 and 30 are so prevalent that they have become an accepted method of problem solving in the island societies, where harmony is highly prized, according to the Rev. Francis Hezel and Dr. Don Rubenstein.

"For several years suicide has been the No. 1 cause of death for youths in Truk," said Father Hezel, a Jesuit who has served for nearly 18 years as director of Xavier High School in the Truk Islands, where the suicide rates are highest.

"The general suicide rate for Truk is 40 per 100,000," Father Hezel said. "The rate for Trukese males between 15 and 25 is a startling 250 per 100,000. This is 20 times the youth rate in the United States."

The above is a partial quotation from a newspaper article also printed in the Pacific Daily News here on Guam. Why would this be true? 20 times higher! In an effort to ascertain the answer to this question that "defies solution," I tape-recorded several interviews with Trukese students at the University of Guam to see what they could tell me about why the suicide rate for young men on Truk is so high. The following are excerpts from the interviews I conducted. Some extraneous verbiage has been deleted and in some cases the dialogue has been re-arranged for more coherent reading, but the information supplied by the informants has been very carefully left in tact:

Merkey & Asa (both female Business Management Majors) ages 20 and 22

What can you tell me about the suicides on Truk?

When they get mad from their parents or his wife they go and they hang themselves.

Is that the way they always kill themselves?

Yeah.

How many people do you know that did this?

Plenty. This last month we heard that three people... Where? In Truk?

One from Moen and two from Wonei.

All men?

Yes.

Do you know how old they were?

The one from Moen is about 15 years. I don't know the other two.

^②Curtis Ladd Bell is a former Peace Corps Volunteer who served three years on Falalus, Wolei Atoll, Yap outer islands with the first group of Volunteers to arrive in Micronesia in 1966. He is currently a graduate student at the University of Guam pursuing a Master's degree in Behavioral Science (Emphasis in psychology).

What's the oldest that you know of?

Twenty-some. Still young.

Do you know why they did that?

For their parents or their brother...sometimes for their wife. They fight.

The one who was 15 wasn't married was he?

Yes [giggle].

And he was fighting with the wife?

I think so.

Do you know of any girls that committed suicide (in Truk)?

No, I don't know of any girls.

Were they drinking? (the recent cases)

The 15 years was drunk. The others I don't know.

Do you have any idea why the young men on Truk are doing this?

I don't know.

How many suicides do you know of?

Maybe 30 some - especially teenagers...all guys...since I was about 15 (5 yrs. ago).

Did you know any of these people personally?

No. They're from a different island. We're from Tol. Tol is a peace (sic) place...no bars...about 1000 people on Tol.

Chester, Political Science Major, a sophomore from the Mortlocks (Outer islands of Truk State) age 24

What can you tell me about the suicides on Truk?

I heard there was some just last week.

Do you know anything about them?

I heard that those guys committed suicide but I didn't hear why. (pause)

Eight years ago there was one guy from _____ island who committed suicide.

How old was he?

He was about 20.

How old were you then?

I was 16...Most of the suicides are in the lagoon...(but) one months (sic) ago a guy from the Mortlocks committed suicide.

Did you know any of these guys personally?

One guy from the upper Mortlocks attending Jr. High School in the lower Mortlocks.

Was he drinking?

No - he had a family problem. He received a letter from his parents. I don't know what they wrote about but that's why he commit suicide...He was 13 or 14 years old.

Do you know of any girls that committed suicide?

No - I never heard about any girls.

Do you have any opinion as to why the suicide rate on Truk is so high?

My own opinion is for family problems or caused by broken hearts like when a guy crying to a girl.

What kind of family problems?

One example is when the parents get mad and scold the son for doing something bad like drinking or going out at night to somebody's house and peeping...and somebody catches them and tell their parents...And another example is when the parents don't approve of a girl that the boy wants to marry and they refuse their permission...In our custom, the boy has to ask his parents...even no matter how old he is. Even if you're 30 some. If your parents are dead, you have to ask your relatives.

Why would the parents say no?

Maybe they don't like the girl or the girl's family...

What do you think the problem is in Truk (regarding the suicides)?

I'm not sure but I think the problem is mostly about family problems...They didn't get along with their parents. Like my parents-I'm not getting along with my parents (even tho) they give me money.

Are the suicides that you know of all by hanging?

Somebody kill themselves by gun and by knife but mostly by hanging.

Do you know anyone who attempted suicide but failed?

Oh yeah. Somebody from my island. He's my cousin.

Did you ever talk to him about it?

My parents talked to him. The problem was he told his parents...he likes one girl and he wants to marry that girl but his parents said no.

How old was he?

The boy is 25 now, but I think he was about 20 then.

What did he do?

He ran outside the house and then he ran and tried to hide from those guys.. he took a small knife and cut the coconut leaf (to use for a rope) [Chester draws a sketch to show that he means he cut flexible strips from the sides of the center of the coconut palm frond].

What happened?

His cousins found him seconds (later) and cut him down.

How did his parents feel?

They feel sorry when somebody told them about it. They feel sorry about it.

Did they let him marry the girl?

They still didn't let him marry that girl...He's in Ponape now.

Do you think he regrets having tried to do that? Or do you think he's sorry that he failed?

(Laughs) I don't know. He was drunk at the time he (tried to) commit suicide.

Was he drunk when he was talking to his parents?

Yeah.

Aren't guys afraid to let their parents see them drunk?

Some-but some of them are not.

Was he drinking at home?

No-he was drinking in the jungle.

What was he drinking?

On the outer islands they drink yeast. He was drinking (a brew made with) yeast...then he went home...about 7 o'clock.

Are the suicides in Truk usually during the day or the night?

Day or night. But they go far away from the house where nobody can see them.

How did they find your cousin?

He didn't go far away-He tried to hide in the mangroves.

When did the suicides start (happening) in Truk?

About 1976. I remember one guy from the outer islands commit suicide and then after that I heard a lot of people in the lagoon commit suicide.

How many suicides do you think there have been (since then)?

More than 20 - maybe 30. Mostly from the lagoon.

What percentage would you say were from the outer islands?

[Chester draws a circle graph to show he estimates about 75% to be from the lagoon].

Did you know any other suicide victims personally?

Yeah - this guy from the island next to me - about 3 miles away - and what they do on this island, we know about.

And you knew the boy?

Yeah - the boy is my father's cousin.

What did he do?

He hang himself because he told his parents about a girl, his classmate. He loves her - he wants to marry her but his parents said no.

How old was he?

He was 18. His parents told him he had to wait but he don't want to wait. The girl married another guy - that's why he kill himself.

How old was she?

She's 15 at that time. Some of the girls are engaged when they are 14 years old.

Because their parents want them to or because they want to?

Their parents want it.

How do they hang themselves?

They climb the trees and reach up to a branch and then tie the rope and then... [Another sketch to who they swing outward from the trunk of the tree once the rope is secured on the branch].

Craig Davis, former Peace Corps Volunteer on Moen Truk, Graduate student in Accounting, from Texas

I'll tell you why I think they commit suicide in Truk. Truk is such a confining culture. It's really hard. They have very rigid standards. The way the men and women conduct themselves. What they say was instilled by the missionaries...no talking to the women in public...a lot of just sitting around underneath the trees...and the jobs are basically kind of make-shift type jobs...These guys come back from Oregon, California or Texas and there's just nothing for them to do.

I don't think its not being able to find a job - its the fact that there's nothing to do - its such a slow down. And the young kids have a tendency to try to hurt their parents by killing themselves.

Where were you working as a Peace Corps Volunteer?

I was on Moen, in the lagoon-the main island. But I stayed with Mortlockese people. I was Agriculture corps.

Were there any suicides while you were there?

They had some on Umon which is in the lagoon. I didn't know of any except the ones I heard about there. But Truk has a reputation for suicides. In one case (I know) there was a conflict with the parents. A woman married a man and there was a son from another man and the step-father really treated the child badly. It was where he was getting back at the mother or the step-father-I'm not sure which...They get frustrated. Television raises their aspirations-and when they can't get their aspirations, they get frustrated. Truk will never be Montana (laughs)-or Tokyo. It's just not there...A lot of people on Truk have been to Saipan and Guam for stays of four or five months-a lot of them have been to the states. This raises their aspirations...Maybe the Japanese influence has something to do with it. Truk is very Japanese oriented. They relate very much back to the Japanese times. They talk about Japanese times this and Japanese times that-maybe the suicide thing is something that the Japanese instilled in them-cause the Japanese looked at suicide as a final avenue of recourse-and an honorable way out...Anyway, there's nothing to do on Truk and yet they all want to go back-...like this Trukese friend of mine upstairs-he wants to go back to his island. His island is very very small and very strict Catholic. There's going to be no women there-there's going to be no drinking--there's going to be nothing! Except maybe a little fishing and that's it! He still wants to go back. He knows he's not going to have anything back there.

What will he do with his education?

Nothing! That's what I'm saying. And these young guys go there and it's like here (Guam)-the guy that has the government job, he's looked up at as being a leader. He's the guy that everyone considers successful. In the past they could be proud of being a fisherman, or a farmer, or a canoe builder or whatever. They had something to build their respect on. But now-the only guy that gets respect is the guy with the government job-the guy with the government jeep. The guys-the young guys-can't get respect through fishing and farming-that's not what "gets the girls"-which is a form of winning respect in society. If they can't get a government job, they feel defeated-there's no avenue. There's only maybe 200-300 government jobs on Truk and there's a multitude of guys who want the jobs. But the Trukese don't want to leave. They're not like the Palauans who go everywhere. They don't feel like they have a chance at home-but they don't want to leave. They end up committing suicide.

Hermes, age 37, Elementary Ed. Major, Jr. year and Rysang, age 27, Political Science Major, Sr. year - both from Nama (outer islands)

What do you guys know about the suicides on Truk?

There was one guy on our island who committed suicide just two weeks ago. I was not there but I was told he got mad with his older brother. His older brother was kind of drunk and then he scolded him. And that guy got pissed off and talked back to his brother. In our custom, the younger ones should not talk back to the older ones...This was at night time-and the guy was really disappointed (depressed?) so he went out and hang himself... He was about 26...There was another one from Moen that I know about (a teenager). The guy got mad because of the older brother--the brother was scold-

ing him. I think most of these suicides on Truk has to do with the customs and traditions--especially the younger teenagers--they cannot talk back to their older people. It's not like the American or western custom. Here--even if you are 25-26 years old, you still belong to the family--your father and mother. You have to ask your father for money to go out drinking and if your father says no, then you get mad.

At age 26, do you still need your parents permission to get married?

Yes, speaking of marriage, sometimes when the parents disapprove of the marriage--doesn't like the girl--so the guy loves the girl--he really fall in love with the girl--and the father doesn't want his kid to get married to her, then the guy hang himself.

Why do the parents say no?

Maybe they don't like the girl's family. Not only the parents of the girl--but maybe the relatives--uncles, cousins,--there's somebody in the girl's relatives that the parents don't like so they say no.

The guy who hung himself two weeks ago was a friend of yours?

Rysang: Yeah--I knew him very well--we went to the same high school. As a matter of fact we worked together on the US census on our island and then we both went to Moen to work (on the census) there.

Do you know why he hung himself?

They told us that he got mad at his older brother.

Do you think he hung himself to hurt the brother or because he was ashamed for having broken the tradition by "talking back?"

Hermes: Yeah--because if the people know that the younger brother was talking back to the older brother then people will say that he doesn't respect his older brother. They will say he is crazy.

Do you know what they argued about?

The older brother was trying to tell him to stop going around drinking at night with people you don't know. Both brothers were drunk but the older brother was not that drunk.

Why do you think the suicide rate is so high on Truk?

I would say because the young men are so aggressive and the older ones are (supposed to be) respected in the community. The younger ones are not respected except by each other. The older people look down on us and do not respect us--unless you have a position--a job--and are contributing (money) to the family and the relatives. But most of the young guys don't have jobs. They just go around the island...The ones that get paid, they support their family, their parents, and their relatives... But, the parents don't really care much about their kids like the Americans who ask their kids about why they come home late. In Truk, you can go around the island till three o'clock in the morning (laughs) and the parents don't say anything. They sleep outside the house so they can come and go when they like.

Isn't it Truk where the people cut themselves and burn themselves to show how brave they are?

Yes--they usually do that. [Hermes laughs and rolls up his pants leg to show several large scars on the calf of his leg].

How did you get those?

We were a group of guys-we were sitting around the fire and we tried to compete. The one that can't do it is chicken. I burn my leg with the cigarette again and again.

How old were you then?

I was about 13-the guys around me were really scared.

So that's how you get respect from your friends?

(Laughing) Some times, say if you're looking for me to fight-we don't really fight. We put our arms together. I cut your arm with my knife and you cut my arm with your knife. [indicates sawing action]. The one that cries means he gives up-he's not brave. He's chicken. (more laughter) Crazy, huh?

These guys are not joking around?

No! the blood is really pouring down and you can see all the nerves-the knife is really going deep. Like you're cutting a fish or sashimi (big laugh). [Rysang shows me the scars on his upper arm].

You have some too? How old were you when you did that?

I was about 12 or 13-in elementary school. [Hermes shows me more on his arm]. Here's some more.

What's that from?

Cigarette.

This is in a group of guys?

Yes-and if you can do it-the guys will respect you.

Were you drinking at the time?

Oh yes-I was drunk.

How does this begin?

Rysang: Somebody just says, "Hey, let's see who's gonna be the brave guy"?
Hermes: I know a friend of mine from Dublon-the girl doesn't like him but he really loves the girl-so he took his knife and cut himself like this-[indicates diagonal cut across the entire width of his chest] and the girl was crying and really grab him-take her blouse and try to plug up the blood and after that the girl like him and they got married.

So it works?

It works! Because the girl really knows how much the guy loves her. She doesn't want the guy to be killed.

But does she really love him-or is she just afraid to be responsible for his death?

That's another thing. She has no choice-she should marry him so she can save his life (laughter).

Do women ever do things like this-or burn themselves to show their love?

Hermes and Rysang together: No-I never heard of that.

Do the older men-the men that are maybe 40 years old now-the fathers of the young men today-do they have these marks?

Yes-most of them do...The young guys even cut the name of the girl or her initials on their arms (to form scars).

Many suicides occur after the father refuses to give money to the son. Where does the father get the money?

Always the father has the money-some relative has a job-so the father gets a little money-but he doesn't spend it. He can hold on to it-even \$10.00-for 5 or 6 months and never spend it. The son knows that the father has the money so he wants the father to give him some. Whatever the son wants he can have (for everything else)-but when it comes to money, the father might say no.

What does the son want the money for?

Drinking, most likely. Maybe for cigarettes-but so he can impress the girls.

Switer Eter, Special Education, Senior(Switer was also alarmed by the news story reporting the high suicide rate on Truk and, along with three other Trukese, did a paper on Trukese suicide for their Education class-enclosed: a copy of that paper).

Do you know of any cases of suicide by women?

I know one case where a guy had an affair with the mother of his wife-his mother-in-law - and when the people found out they committed suicide together. You know in our society, that really looks bad-for a man to fool around with his mother-in-law.

How did they do this?

They jumped over a cliff-a very high cliff (laughs)-just like Two Lovers Point-and they died...(pause). Just recently, in the last two weeks, I heard there were two guys that committed suicide (in Truk) by hanging themselves - and they died! Just last week!

Yes-I heard that too.

Yeah-that's really something. And that bothers me...our survey showed that they (Trukese) hide their problems. They're not open. They're not willing to share with others. They're kind of withdrawn. (pause). Forty percent of the 129 (Trukese) surveyed said they would keep their problems to themselves (and/or) take revenge on others by inflicting harm on themselves. (See report).

What are some of the reasons you think these guys are hanging themselves on Truk?

I think sometimes when they don't feel accepted by their community or their parents-they begin to feel that "Why live on earth if they don't have anything" - they feel left out.

Do you know any of these victims personally?

I know them but not really that good.

Well enough to know why they did what they did?

Some. One of them was because they don't let him marry the one that he loves and then he committed suicide.

How old was the guy in this case?

20 some. That's the case that I know because it happened close to where I was.

(your friend) Hermes was telling me about the Trukese burning or cutting themselves to show their bravery-have you ever seen or heard about this?

Yes - it's very common. It's very common among the young boys of 10 or even less - 8 - we put fire on ourselves.

Do you have any scars like this?

Yeah - I have one here. [He shows me his arm].

How did you get that scar?

We were just trying to see who's the bravest and we burn ourselves with the coconut leaves - and if you say ouch! - then you're not that brave - but if you can stand the pain, then they say "that guy's strong." Sometimes they show their love affection in doing that - when you're older and you talk to your lover and she doesn't really believe you, then you show her by stabbing yourself or burning yourself or mark her initials on your body.

Hermes says sometimes they even write out the whole name.

Yeah - I have one here. [shows me his other arm]. See? When I was in High School, I wrote my sweetheart's name (laughs) - just to show her I love her.

How did she feel about that?

(laughs). I don't know. Maybe she thinks, "he really loves me" (more laughter) - (long pause). Suicide was a common thing in the old days - especially for the old people when they felt they were too old and they feel they were no use anymore - or they were bothering their relatives to take care of them - then the easy way out is to commit suicide. That was in the old days.

How long ago was this?

Even before the Japanese time - way back!...Also, another thing that they commit suicide for - you know, when they do something wrong - something that is bad in the eyes of the public-then they committed suicide. Like the guy having an affair with his relatives (incest) - and that's really bad in our culture. In the old days it was considered a way of solving your problems.

Can you tell me any more about this (suicide by old people)?

In fact there was an old man back in 1970 who committed suicide because he feel that he was too old. That guy was related to my grandfather. Sometimes when they feel that their relatives don't care about them then they commit suicide.

In the old days - before the Japanese - how did the old people commit suicide?
Hanging - that's the easiest way.

Tell me more about this practice of burning and cutting yourself.

Lovers do that too. You burn your girlfriend's arm or leg or whatever and she'll burn yours.

At the same time?

Yes, at the same time!

And if you last the longest then that shows your love is stronger?

Yes, but it also means that you love each other. That's the proof.

That's a seal! (laughs) - (long pause). There can be two reasons that you can harm yourself. One is to show your lover that you love her and the other is to show your parents that you feel left out or rejected.

Why don't you chop off your finger (instead of committing suicide) to show your parents how you feel?

I don't know (laughs).

Father Hezel says that Trukese don't commit suicide because of not having a job that that's an "American work ethic." Do you agree?

Yeah-he's right. A job is not that really important. It's that the old people and the young people don't understand each others. The young people feel that it's time to change-in order to keep up with the rest of the world. For instance, the marriage custom - Before, most of the marriages were arranged by parents - but nowadays, you can hardly find any couples that were arranged by the parents. They go to school and they find the one that they love and they take it.

But the parents of the young people today - their wives and husbands were found for them by their parents?

Yeah - most of them - or if the son likes a girl, then he approaches his parents and his parents do the talking for him. They go and make the arrangements with the other parties. But now if a son likes a girl and she likes him, then they just run out and elope.

Trukese don't consider leaving the island as a way of escaping from the pressures of his parents?

No - he doesn't consider that as an alternative. We're not like the other Micronesians that can move around and stay away from home for so long. A Trukese who runs away from his island would be looked down on by all his friends and his family - and he wouldn't find friends on other islands - like the Palauans, who have friends on other islands.

When someone commits suicide on Truk - what do people say about him?

There are different feelings. Some people say "that guy is crazy." Some people say he was right for doing it. Most people express a feeling of sadness. Sometimes they blame the parents.

If he commits suicide to hurt his parents, isn't that what he wants? For other people to blame the parents?

Yeah - sometimes they get revenge by hanging themselves - thinking that "if I die, they will suffer for that - they will know the consequence." There is a song composed by some of the youths about how they want to commit suicide so that when they die their spirit will see their loved ones sipping coffee and eating...something like that-about what would happen after their suicide-the reaction of the people. There's another popular song that was on the radio-by a female composer, very popular in Truk-She was asking the Lord to take her life away so that when she dies everyone will talk about her and sure enough, a few years later she died (of natural causes) and everyone was saying that what she was singing about came true! But you know - in the Trukese songs you can hear about expressing of killing themselves.

What is the Trukese attitude about life after death?

They believe that your spirit will go to another place - where the spirits go.

Do they believe the spirit can look back and see the living?

Yeah! And they believe that the life after death is better than today's life. Most of those who commit suicide believe that their parents will suffer and the old belief is that their spirit will still know what's going on after death.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Why is the suicide rate for young males so high on Truk? In the light of the interviews conducted in this study the primary factors appear to be:

1. The Generation Gap - "The old people and the young people don't understand each other." The modern world moved in on Truk in the late 60's and the new generation of young Trukese are an entirely different breed than any other generation of Trukese before them. Traditional values are crumbling fast under the pressures of modernization and young people are caught in a state of anomie highly conducive to suicide.
2. Unachievable Aspirations - Young people - exposed to the outside world through television and travel - are frustrated by the realization that the luxuries of modern life will never be theirs on Truk.
3. Absence of Respect - Traditional means of gaining respect are no longer relevant. The unemployed are idle and a small percentage of the total can find employment. "Only those with jobs have the respect of the community." A sense of worthlessness prevails among the young.
4. Burning and Cutting - A time honored practice of inflicting harm on oneself as a means of demonstrating ones sincerity or bravery is well ingrained into the youth of Truk - as evidenced by the self inflicted burnings and cuttings described in the interviews.
5. Reluctance to be Open with Problems - Trukese tend to keep their problems to themselves. This is likely an extension of the rules of the burning and cutting ceremonies. (To cry out is to appear unmanly).
6. Suicide, an old custom - Suicide is considered to be an honorable way out as evidenced by the stories of the elderly suicides. As it appears to be an old custom, it has cultural "acceptance."
7. Reluctance to Re-locate - Trukese are reluctant to re-locate as a means of escape from family pressures. These young men would rather cease to exist than to exist away from their homes and families.

This study was conducted in the hopes of shedding light on the causative factors in Truk's high suicide rate for young men. In this regard, I believe that considerable insight was gained in the course of the study toward an explanation as to why this sad fact is true.

No attempt is made herein to recommend solutions to the problem but it is hoped that this study may be of assistance to future investigators and may at least in part lead to corrective solutions to the problem of suicides among the young men of Truk.