“But I Didn’t Want to Go to Hell”
Faith Communities’ Stigmatization of Suicide among Young, Rural Micronesian Men

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Presenter Disclosure

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1.) The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose
Suicide Facts & Figures

- A 5-fold increase in suicide rate 1963-83
- 250 per 100,000 for young, Chuukese men
- 1-in-40 between ages 15-24 will commit suicide
The Family’s Role in Suicide

- Hezel 1989: Suicidal behavior bound up in family
- Family: Traditional → Western
- Family: Protective → Causative

Study Question

- What social forces could replace the traditionally protective role of fathers?
- When young men talk about suicide experiences, what do they express about the church?
Study Population & Recruitment

• N=39
• Young men aged 14-18 who attended Camp Boys to Men 2010-2013
• Purposive, convenience sampling
• Gatekeepers informed families, got permission for researcher

Study Design & Analysis

• Qualitative interviews
• Detailed notes
• Inductively coded
  — Hell
  — Tipis (Sin)
  — Fio (Conflict)
• Thematic analysis
Findings

1. Suicidal behavior triggered by family conflict
2. Suicide-related feelings secreted by shame
3. Shame rooted in religious teaching of sin

Result 1: Suicide triggered by conflict in family

Mental Wellness → Threat to Young Man's Autonomy or Agency
Intervention Point: Father → Intervention Point: Friend/Cousin

*If you’ve ever considered suicide, what event precipitated it? “Family stuff”

“I wanted to drop out, but my family wouldn’t defer to me.”

“My family never asks me what I want. I can never make a decision without first considering them.”
Result 2: Feelings made secret by shame

Have you talked about your suicidal feelings to anyone? “No, because then people will know.”

“My friend was only pretending because he was drunk, but he was ashamed, too.”

“I didn’t talk to him because I was worried about the church rules – because it’s sin. I was ashamed.”

Results 3: Shame rooted in religious teaching that suicide is sinful

Why were you ashamed?

“It’s a church command.”

“It’s morally wrong to commit suicide.”

“I am afraid I will go to hell.”

“I remembered that suicide is wrong. It’s not good for Christians to do.”

“I was worried that people in church would know and talk about my problem.”
Discussion

- Permanent family shift
- Conflict: moving externally
- Sinful suicide
  - Preventive
  - Stigmatizing
  - Towards a new culture?

Limitations

- Convenience sampling
- Interviews not recorded
- Underrepresentation of suicide completers
- Cultural barrier
Future Directions

- Study of Religious Leaders
- Effect on Spiritual Formation
- Explore Ideation More Deeply

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Citations


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