

Guam's *Focus on Life*

State/Territory: Guam Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse

Website: www.peaceguam.org

About Guam's "Focus on Life" State Youth Suicide Prevention Grant:
Suicide in Guam may be influenced by various factors, such as culture and ethnicity

Traditionally, Guam and the other islands in Micronesia are matrilineal societies. Chamorros (Guam's indigenous people) make up 37% of Guam's population. The cultural practices of the Chamorros involve the importance of extended family relationships and due respect for parents and the elderly. Each individual family member is held responsible and accountable for keeping the family name and reputation in 'good standing' in the community and must not bring 'shame' upon them.

Suicide on Guam is a taboo subject and is not openly discussed or acknowledged even among family members who have intimate knowledge of a suicide and related circumstances. Deaths by suicide are doggedly explained by surviving family members (who feel a great sense of shame and failure) as "terminal illnesses" and/or "accidents". This sense of imposed secrecy by family leaders among other members perpetuates the current problem and places great challenges in prevention and early intervention efforts.

Governor of Guam Felix P. Camacho approved Guam's *Focus on Life* – State Plan for Suicide Prevention and Early Intervention and calls upon his PEACE Council and Guam's State Epidemiological Workgroup to work collaboratively with the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse to prevent further suicides.

An average of 23 persons (between ages 14-29) killed themselves each year from 2000 to 2007 in Guam. The Guam high school 2007 YRBS was completed by 1,716 ninth through twelve grade students (Male 53.2%, Female 46.8%) in four public high schools; a student response rate of 78%. The results indicated that girls were more likely than boys to indicate that they had suicidal ideations (28.0% vs. 16.6%), a suicide plan (27.5% vs. 15.9%), or made suicide attempts (21.3% vs. 12.2%).

Chamorro students had the highest percentage of actual attempts of suicide (34.0%), followed by 28.8% of students with multiple ethnicities (Chamorro and one other race), and Filipino students at 13.6%.

This State Youth Suicide Prevention Grant will focus on individuals between the ages of 10-24 years. All available resources will be leveraged to ensure the successful achievements of this proposal's stated goals and objectives, to include establishment of Guam's suicide surveillance and monitoring system. Studies on Guam's suicide problem are few and sporadic. The island's current system and capacity to uniformly collect, analyze and report data relative to intentional self-harm, suicide attempts and deaths by suicide will be strengthened at a state and community level. Available resources will be

leveraged to ensure the successful achievements of this proposal's stated goals and objectives.

Key Personnel:

Barbara S.N. Benavente, M.P.A.

Principal Investigator/Project Director
Supervisor, Prevention & Training Branch
Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse
790 Governor Carlos G. Camacho Road
Tamuning, Guam 96913

671-477-9079 thru 9083

bbena@guamcell.net

Helene M. Paulino

Special Projects Coordinator
Prevention & Training Branch
Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse
790 Governor Carlos G. Camacho Road
Tamuning, Guam 96913

671-477-9079 thru 9083

hpaulino@guamcell.net

M. Grace Lapid-Rosadino, M.P.A.

Research and Statistical Analyst
Prevention & Training Branch
Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse
790 Governor Carlos G. Camacho Road
Tamuning, Guam 96913

671-477-9079 thru 9083

lapidg@yahoo.com

Gayle R. Osborn

Program Coordinator III
Prevention & Training Branch
Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse
790 Governor Carlos G. Camacho Road
Tamuning, Guam 96913

671-477-9079 thru 9083

grosborn@yahoo.com

Peter Cruz

Holiday Crisis Hotline Coordinator
Prevention & Training Branch
Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse
790 Governor Carlos G. Camacho Road
Tamuning, Guam 96913

671-477-9079 thru 9083

napufive@yahoo.com