

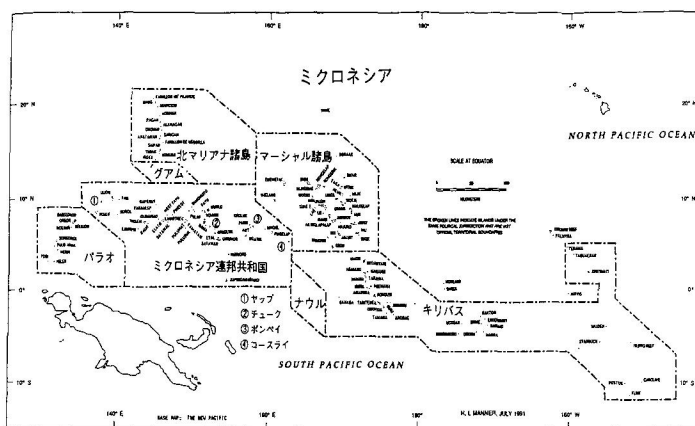
## Youth Suicide and Social Change in Micronesia

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The Micronesian islands in recent decades have experienced an extraordinarily high incidence of youth suicide. Among the age group at greatest risk—young men between 15 and 24 years old—suicide rates in Micronesia surpass reported rates from any other region within Asia and the Pacific Islands. Indeed, the youth suicide rates in Micronesia have achieved the tragic distinction of being among the highest in the world. This paper describes some of the research on youth suicide in Micronesia, and summarizes some of the relationships between epidemic youth suicide, social change, and culture in Micronesia (see also Rubinstein 1983, 1992a, 1992b, 1995).

The area of Micronesia under discussion here includes Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the Marshall Islands (Map). Within this area, there are about fifteen different languages spoken, and significant cultural differences exist from one main island group to another, such as Palau, Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, Kosrae, and the Marshall Islands. Not included in this study are the US Territory of Guam and the US Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, which are culturally and historically quite distinct from the rest of Micronesia. Also not included in this study are the independent republics of Nauru and Kiribati, which also have had a different colonial and cultural history. For the purposes of this discussion, then, “Micronesia” refers only to Palau, the four states of the FSM, and the Marshall Islands.



The cultures and languages of the islands within this area show extensive variation, because the area was originally settled from quite different directions and at different time periods (Denoon 1997). The western Micronesian high islands of Yap and Palau—as well as the Mariana Islands—were settled directly from Southeast Asia, about 3,000 or 4,000 years ago.

