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Influence of the digital space on suicidal behavior of adolescents

ВПЛИВ ЦИФРОВОГО СЕРЕДОВИЩА НА СУЇЦИДАЛЬНУ ПОВЕДІНКУ ПІДЛІТКІВ

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Abstract

With the Internet now firmly established as the main medium of communication in today's world, studying the effect of its various aspects on the behavior of minors is now more relevant than ever.

This article provides arguments in favor of the need to study the phenomenon of cybersuicide among adolescents in light of the rising number of suicides among children in many countries in recent years, including Ukraine.

The aim of this article is to study the role of the digital space, namely the Internet, in the reinforcement of suicidal ideation and intentions among children and, ultimately, in driving them to suicide.

To achieve this goal, a number of general and special research methods for understanding social realities were used, to ensure objectivity and accuracy of obtained data, which was all the more important given the nature of the subject.

The dangers of the pre-suicidal state (pre-suicide) were examined, including from a medical perspective. Particular attention was

Анотація

У зв'язку з тим, що Інтернет став головним каналом сучасного спілкування дослідження різних аспектів його впливу на поведінку неповнолітніх є вельми актуальним питанням.

У статті обґрунтовано доцільність вивчення феномену кіберсуїциду серед підлітків, оскільки останніми роками в багатьох країнах, у тому числі й в Україні, спостерігається збільшення кількості самогубств серед дітей.

Ціллю статті є дослідження впливу цифрового середовища, зокрема Інтернету, на посилення суїцидальних думок, намірів та, зрештою, на схилення дітей до вчинення суїциду.

Для досягнення мети дослідження було використано сукупність загальнонаукових та спеціально-наукових методів пізнання соціальної дійсності, що дозволило забезпечити об'єктивність та достовірність отриманих даних, з огляду на специфіку об'єкта та предмета дослідження.

У статті розглянуто небезпечність передсуїцидального стану (пресуїциду), у тому числі з медичної точки зору. При цьому увага

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paid to behavioral tendencies common among adolescents.

The authors arrived at the conclusion that the digital space can both trigger suicidal thoughts and intentions in adolescents with its content and facilitate their committing suicide through “support” or even encouragement from online friends.

The authors stress that related content children post on social media can help discover whether they have been having suicidal ideation. Arguments are given in favor of the need for parents, teachers, and psychologists to monitor said content to be able to provide timely psychological help, including via the digital space.

Key words: Internet, cybersuicide, adolescents, self-harm, suicide, digital space.

Introduction

The Internet has become an integral part of the life of modern society in general and children in particular. The digital space has great potential for facilitating the development and self-realization of a child’s personality. Digital libraries and museums, teaching, informational and entertainment websites allow today’s school students to download e-books, music, photos, etc. Children use technology for communication and leisure. In a word, the Internet is a part of life for them, and the virtual world it offers – their means of socializing. The Internet’s importance in everyone’s life was only boosted by COVID-19 lockdowns.

Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and others – readily accessible communication platforms – allow people to maintain their social connections and thus fight loneliness, and it’s just as true for lower age demographics. Social media are now firmly and permanently integrated into our everyday life, so much so that a person without social media is a rarity today. It is mostly online, within the virtual space, that adolescents are socially active these days.

While the digital space offers countless benefits, neither can we ignore its negative aspects. Thus, children in a number of European states, including Ukraine, as well as in the United States, China, and Japan often withdraw into the virtual world because of their addiction to gadgets and the Internet. Every day younger

приділена особливостям поведінкових проявів, характерних для підліткового віку.

У своїй роботі автори дійшли висновку, що цифрове середовище з одного боку, своїм контентом підштовхує підлітків до суїцидальних думок, намірів, а з іншого, – сприяє скоєнню ними суїциду, завдяки «підтримці» або, навіть, схиланню з боку віртуальних «друзів».

Автори наголошують, що відповідний контент, розміщений на особистих сторінках підлітка в соціальних мережах може допомогти у виявленні суїцидальних намірів дитини. Доводиться необхідність контролю за такою інформацією з боку батьків, педагогів, психологів для організації психологічної допомоги, у тому числі з використанням цифрового середовища.

Ключові слова: Інтернет, кіберсуїцид, неповнолітні, селфхарм, суїцид, цифрове середовище.

generations spend over 5 hours in the digital space on average, and some children are always online (Kulyk, Lubenets, Kulakova, & Naumova, 2020). Secondly, as a result of being constantly online, they run a greater risk of encountering dangers that exist in the virtual world, from cyber violence and fraud to drugs and encouragement to commit suicide. The Internet, with children as its active users, is among the most popular channels for the spread of these destructive ideas.

The rising virtualization of our lives through the use of digital technologies is having an impact on the human psyche (especially among children), resulting in the emergence of new phenomena (e.g. Google amnesia, Facebook depression, etc.). Social relationships have been affected as well. We now have such new concepts as “stranger friend,” “virtual friendship,” “virtual love” as well as new kinds of online dangers and risks like “cyberbullying,” “sexting,” “grooming,” “cybersuicide,” etc. This multitude of social relations has given birth to all sorts of online communities, including destructive ones, which promote murder or suicide and pose a real threat to everyone involved in them, including children. A number of new terms have appeared in the English language to define these phenomena, and they are now used universally, and not just in academic circles. Among these terms are cybersuicide (internet suicide), online suicide, webcam suicide, net suicide packs, digital self-harm, parasuicide, etc.

Cybersuicide, or internet suicide, refers to the conception and/or realization of suicidal ideation through various channels of communication online (Birbal et al., 2009). Webcam suicide is suicide committed in front of a webcam. One of its forms is online suicide, or deathcasting, which involves streaming one's death online. Examples of such suicides have been covered in the media (Walker, 2014) and in academic literature (Phillips, Diesfeld, & Mann, 2019). Net suicide packs are group suicides by users that met on the Internet (Rajagopal, 2004). Digital self-harm, or parasuicide, is any non-lethal self-damaging act committed with the express intent to inflict bodily injury or death. Parasuicide (self-harm) includes both fatal suicide attempts as well as actions with a low risk of death, such as cutting or causing other harm to yourself (Comtois, 2002). Fake suicide is simulated or staged suicide.

As we can see, there are many types of online suicidal behavior, but the problem is much broader than it seems and includes both suicide as an act and suicide as a subject of discussion, with the latter potentially capable of driving users to perform certain actions, or of encouraging or discouraging suicidal thoughts.

The goal of this article is to study the role of the digital space (communication medium), specifically the Internet, in the reinforcement of suicidal thoughts and intentions among children, and, ultimately, in their decision to commit suicide.

Methodology

To achieve this goal and accomplish the tasks this entails, the authors made use of general and special research methods. Thus, the logical and semantic method was used to determine terminology associated with cybersuicide among minors; formal logic was used to define the social origins of the cybersuicide phenomenon among children as well as the effect of the digital space on the behavior of adolescents; sociological and statistical methods were used for the analysis of collected empirical data and official statistics; the psychological method helped determine the characteristics of children susceptible to suicidal ideation (or suicidal behavior); and the sorting and summarizing method was used to formulate conclusions and general assessments as well as recommendations on how to improve child suicide prevention and stop the promotion of suicide-related ideas among underage Internet users.

Literature Review

The issue of child safety in the digital space has been on the agenda of numerous institutions, especially in recent years, including international organizations, researchers from various fields of knowledge, law enforcement agencies, media, and public organizations of all levels.

Legal regulation of online relations and information security of Internet users, including children, were studied in the works of Zolotar O. (2018); Nashynets-Naumova A. (2017), Lesko N. (2017), Prypkhan I. and Artemovych I. (2014). The main risks and dangers of the digital space were examined by Vasylevych V. (2013), Garkusha Yu. (2021), Kulyk K. (2016), Osipenko A. and Solovyov V. (2019), Richardson H. (2020), Rimer J.R. (2017). Suicide among children was studied by Baume C., Cantor C.H. and Rolfe A. (1997), Becker K. (2004), Birbal R. et al. (2009), Phillips J.G. et al. (2019), Dunlop S.M., More E. and Romer D. (2011), Lee S.Y. and Kwon Y. (2018), Klyuchko E. (2014), Lubenets I., Tolochko G. and Naumova I. (2020), Soldatova G., Chigarkova S., Drenyova A. and Ilyukhina S. (2019) and others. Thus, this article draws on the works of both national and foreign researchers.

Plenty of research has also been done in regards to the Internet's impact on children's behavior, including suicidal behavior, which once again demonstrates the relevance of this subject today.

Results and Discussion

Global statistics show that in the 15-19 age group, suicide is the second most common cause of death among girls (after pregnancy and childbirth complications) and the third most common among boys (after traffic accidents and interpersonal violence) (Bega, 2019). Moreover, the number of such incidents involving adolescents is rising. Thus, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of suicides among children aged 10-14 has tripled over the past decade. Ukraine, where the suicide rate is twice as high as in the EU, is no exception here (Mori, 2021).

Ukraine's Unified State Register of Pretrial Investigations reports 97 suicides among children in 2018, 111 in 2019, and 123 in 2020. In 2021, 150 children committed suicide in the first six months alone (Kovalevska, & Gribanova, 2022), which is more than during the entire previous year. It should be mentioned that official statistics include only completed

suicides, not suicide attempts, of which there is over a hundred for every completed suicide in the age group under 25. Completed suicides make up only 1% of suicide attempts among adolescents, although one should keep in mind that every such attempt threatens the child's life.

When studying the issue of suicides among adolescents, we must remember that adolescence is accompanied by numerous physical, emotional, social, and psychological changes in the child. Unfulfilled (for various reasons) expectations, whether academic, social or family-related, could lead to feelings of rejection, loneliness, and profound dissatisfaction with life. Meanwhile, the lack of life experience, low resistance to stress and high emotionality make it difficult for children to approach the problems they face rationally. When things go badly at school or at home, the resulting developments and stress often make adolescents overreact, since physical and hormonal changes in their body cause emotional instability, irritability and low self-esteem.

Statistics show that 11% of adolescents under 18 suffer from depression-related disorders, girls more than boys. The risk of depression increases with age. Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents. Failure to address mental issues in adolescence may not only have negative effects that could manifest even in adulthood, but may also cause suicidal ideation in childhood. According to the World Health Organization, major depressive disorder is the leading cause of disability in the 15-44 age range as well as one of the leading causes of death in this age (Ministry of Health of Kirov Oblast, 2022; WHO, 2021).

At the same time, about 80% of adolescents who committed suicide had symptoms of PTSD or displayed violent and aggressive behavior. Many suicide attempts also result from abuse, humiliation, e.g. bad experiences in school, bullying (cyberbullying), interpersonal conflicts with a romantic partner, etc. (World Health Organization, 2006, p. 7).

Communication-related risks which many adolescents face also play a major role in the aggravation of pre-suicidal behavior. This is especially true for aggressive communication, ranging from rude, negative and cruel messages online to extreme and traumatic cyberbullying – systematic and deliberate aggression against someone incapable of defending themselves. Among the most dangerous and damaging risks

that have become commonplace in recent years is the disclosure of intimate, defamatory, offensive, and degrading information, obscene offers, and sex-related violence online. This includes sexting (intimate correspondence); grooming (winning a child's trust for the purpose of sexual relations and exploitation); sexual blackmail – threatening to make the victim's intimate photos public to extort additional photos, videos, or sexual favors; revenge porn – disclosing intimate images and videos without the consent of the person featured in them, posting ads saying that the victim offers sexual services, etc. (Soldatova et al., 2019, p. 12).

It's worth mentioning that revenge porn is not yet criminalized in Ukraine, while in a number of other countries (France – Art. 226-2-1 of the Criminal Code; UK – Art. 33 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Act, 2015, Canada – Art. 162.1 of the Criminal Code, 1985 and others) it is a criminal offense.

The above-mentioned risks can be encountered when communicating via chats, messengers (WhatsApp, Telegram, Skype, etc.) social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), dating sites, forums, and blogs. Virtual violence makes adolescents experience stress and depression because of their inability to solve a problem. In this state, in order to overcome emotional and psychological pain, fear, feelings of helplessness and loneliness, children sometimes direct their aggression against themselves, often using information on ways to inflict harm that they find on the Internet. Self-destructive behavior which manifests itself in intentional infliction of physical damage to oneself, one's own body, is called self-harm.

One example of this is the Blue Whale death group (more on them below) whose members make cuts on their bodies. Photos of such cuts have been showcased in numerous media outlets and Internet forums, which only serves to increase the popularity of these groups among adolescents.

The Internet has been a fertile environment for the spread of self-harm-related information, further contributing to the rising interest for this practice. Studies say, 87% of psychiatric patients with a history of self-harm saw images of self-cutting online, at the age of 11 on average, before they started doing it themselves (Soldatova et al., 2019, p. 114).

Soldatova G. and her co-authors (2019, p.p. 109-110) note in their work that most

adolescents and young adults have seen content related to self-destructive behavior on multiple occasions. Two-thirds of the respondents have seen such content online, 65.9% of them have encountered advice on how to commit suicide, and 72.5% have seen content on ways to inflict physical damage and pain on themselves. Most frequently such content draws the attention of 15-17-year-olds (75%). After the age of 18, the interest gradually weakens (68%).

Thus, there is a whole number of factors that could drive an adolescent to commit suicide (resentment, loneliness, feeling misunderstood, death of a loved one, lack of parental attention, problems at home, fear of punishment, romantic problems, pregnancy, revenge, imitation, need for attention, etc.), and it's often exacerbated by alcohol and drug abuse, Internet addiction, being stigmatized when reaching out for help, as well as the availability of means of committing suicide. Under these circumstances, the digital space, including online news sites, social media, suicide-themed sites, and other similar online platforms and content can play a major role in reinforcing an adolescent's suicidal ideation.

The importance of information technologies and the Internet in today's society cannot be denied. The digital space has become part of almost every aspect of our lives, from health care to education and leisure. Suicidal behavior is no exception here, as it has also changed under the influence of the Internet, especially among adolescents who are its most active users.

It should be noted that so-called "suicide clubs" have existed since ancient times and in many eras. However, unlike their predecessors, contemporary suicide communities:

- are considerably more numerous;
- have no geographical boundaries and are not bound to a particular place;
- allow any person of any age to join (with some rare exceptions) (Klyuchko, 2014, p. 69).

As mentioned above, cybersuicide is something that exists in many countries. It emerged with the advent of the Internet and continues spreading online. The term cybersuicide in relation to suicide and its propaganda on the Internet was proposed back in 1997 by Pierre Baume and his co-authors in their work "Cybersuicide: the role of interactive suicide notes on the internet." Ria Birbal and co-authors (2009) point out in their work "Cybersuicide and the adolescent population: challenges of the future?" that

cybersuicide is associated with websites that lure in vulnerable members of society and teach them how to inflict self-harm and commit suicide. The ease of access to the Internet and the speed at which information travels online facilitate the spread of such propaganda, drawing the attention of adolescents.

Numerous studies of the influence of the virtual space on suicidal behavior among adolescents and young adults have shown that the Internet often contributes to the risk of suicide among children due to their impressionability, suggestibility, emotional volatility, their ability to feel and experience everything more vividly, their tendency toward conformism and imitation, weak critical thinking, egocentric aspirations, and impulsive decision-making. Dunlop S. and co-authors (2011) arrive at this conclusion in their study "Where do youth learn about suicides on the Internet, and what influence does this have on suicidal ideation?" after establishing empirically that suicide-themed discussion forums and other online platforms significantly strengthen young people's suicidal ideation.

Moreover, it's easy to find content on the Internet that promotes suicide and provides instructions on how to do it, and it's just as easy to find forums and chat rooms dedicated to the discussion of suicide as well as to join so-called death groups, the users of which promote and develop suicidal ideas and plans. After all, children usually seek in the virtual world that which they have been unable to find in the real one, among people closest to them, namely support (a death group member admitted as much (Kovalevska, Griбанова, 2022): Many of the victims simply don't stand a chance with their virtual "friends" and online audience urging them on, openly encouraging their thoughts of suicide.

19-year-old Abraham Biggs from Florida announced his plans to commit suicide on a bodybuilding forum in 2008 and streamed it live over a webcam. He said he was considering death by overdose. His post sparked a mixture of concern, jokes, and encouragement. About 1,500 people watched for 11 hours as Abraham was dying from a drug overdose. With 1,500 witnesses, only 4 attempts were made to help him (by looking up contact details of Miami police to make a phone call or send them an email). However, by the time authorities were notified, the boy had already been dead (Phillips et al., 2019).

James G. Phillips and his co-authors describe cases involving online suicides in their work “Instances of online suicide, the law and potential solutions” (2019) and say that the Internet allows users to create their own suicide content, with the audience watching suicidal behavior (e.g. death leaps or other life-threatening acts), commenting on it and discussing it while the person streams the event online or takes selfies of their death. The authors noted a rising number of suicides involving jumpers who decided to end their life after watching related content on the Internet. They cite the tragic deaths of Dylan Yount in San Francisco, United States, and Shaun Dykes in Derby, UK, which were accompanied by audience reactions on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Yelp, and YouTube. In both of these cases, the victims felt there was no going back for them. In Dylan’s case, online comments and anonymous voices from the crowd gathered below were urging him to jump as he was standing on the ledge (Phillips et al., 2019).

In light of the above, we can say that the virtual environment, on one hand, can induce suicidal thoughts in a person (through the influence of suicide-related content online), and on the other hand, can drive a person to suicide through “support” and encouragement from a virtual audience (influence of virtual contacts). Thus, Internet platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp, and Telegram serve as a tool for people with suicidal ideation for finding like-minded individuals and forming groups, as well as a tool for encouraging others to commit suicide.

Particularly relevant in this regard is the work of S.Y. Lee and Y. Kwon “Twitter as a place where

people meet to make suicide pacts” (2018). The authors monitored Korean tweets containing the term “suicide pact” on Twitter. After 43 days of research, they found 1,702 tweets posted by 551 users who sought to make a suicide pact. Many of the tweets contained detailed contact information, including the user’s city, gender, age, preferred method of communication, and preferred gender of the partner. This study demonstrates that social networks such as Twitter are popular venues for finding partners for a suicide pact (Lee & Kwon, 2018, p. 21).

An example of the second aspect of the Internet’s role, i.e. encouraging suicides, is the suicide of a 16-year-old girl from Malaysia (2019) who took her own life after doing a survey on her Instagram page, asking whether she should go on living. According to the police, at one point 69% of the votes were in favor of her death. A similar tragedy happened to 14-year-old London schoolgirl Molly Russell who took her own life in November 2017. Before her death, she was reportedly browsing posts on social media related to self-harm, depression and suicide (BBC News, 2019).

So why does online communication, often with complete strangers that could be on the opposite side of the globe, have such a powerful effect on young Internet users?

To answer this, we should consider children’s personal space in real life and the virtual one, which, in our opinion, Galina Soldatova demonstrated very well in her work (2017). We can see that the child’s personal space offline and online is not the same – it gets rearranged.

Table 1.
Comparison of the child's personal space offline and online

Real life	Virtual life (online environment)
Me	Me
Family	Friends
Friends	“Stranger friends” (online friends)
Acquaintances	Acquaintances
Adults	Family
Strangers	Adults

As the table shows, FRIENDS take center stage in the child’s personal space online. Acquaintances, who in real life are just one position below friends, give way to online friends, who are essentially strangers, while

family (parents and siblings) and professional help (adults) trail behind.

We believe, this rearrangement occurs due to a desire to build new social connections, which is much easier done in the anonymous Internet

environment, especially for a shy teenager with difficulties in communication and interpersonal relationships. When faced with a crisis and unable to find support among those closest to them, children try to find the understanding and comfort they need in the virtual space, where all they have are virtual friends that act in accordance with their own interests, moods and perspectives. It's all too easy for such friends to click "death" in a survey, and adolescents in a pre-suicidal state are highly sensitive to such things and often perceive them as a call to action.

To clarify: pre-suicide is the period between the onset of suicidal ideation and the attempt to act on them. During this time, the person experiences constant depression, dark thoughts, and growing dissatisfaction with their living conditions (Klyuchko, 2014, p. 69).

The 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) has suicidal ideation under code MB26.A. It involves suicide-related thoughts and ideas, from merely thinking that you would be better off dead to making complex plans to take your own life (ICD-11 for Mortality and Morbidity Statistics, 2022).

Thus, people having such thoughts, including adolescents, require medical help as it is extremely difficult to deal with this problem on your own.

The content that members of suicide clubs post on their social media shows that they suffer from depression and loneliness. This makes them particularly suggestible and susceptible to dark moods, which is characteristic of the pre-suicidal period (Klyuchko, 2014, p. 69). Most people at this stage try to draw the attention of others to their plans and problem by talking or posting about their wish to die on their social media or other Internet platforms. When adolescents post about it or do streams for other members of death groups, they seldom hear any objections. On the contrary, the audience usually supports their intentions in every way by sharing how and where it would be best to commit suicide, etc. Their encouragements are accompanied by recommendations of various thematic attributes: music, books, videos, pictures, etc. This normalizes suicide in the eyes of adolescents, making them think they "get" something that most others don't.

It must be said that information technologies can also be used for combating suicidal ideation and preventing suicide (e.g. hotline websites that

provide psychological help online), but they are not as popular as they should be.

We agree with James G. Phillips and his colleagues who said in their 2019 work that social media also provide the means for desperate people to draw attention to their suffering. The problem is though that pre-suicidal people who announce their plans to commit suicide online are very likely to see approval, not objections, or end up in a death group, especially when you are young and vulnerable. Administrators of these groups often find new members by discovering their dejected posts on the Internet.

Unfortunately, in recent years Ukraine has also seen a growing number of death groups – online communities, usually on social media, in which adolescents play a kind of "game" that involves performing various traumatic tasks (like cutting your hand with a blade and recording it on video). It starts with the group administrator giving members from 13 to 50 tasks (the number is up to the administrator), but the ultimate goal is to goad children into committing suicide on camera. According to the police, the administrators then sell these videos on the Internet or on DarkNet (Parkhomenko, 2019). This is how Blue Whale, Red Owl, Quiet Home, Run or Die, Wake Me Up at 4:20 and other death groups operate. Cybersuicide has become a trend among minors. The peak of the popularity of suicide games among Ukrainian adolescents was recorded in late 2016 - early 2017. Back then, Ukrainian cyber police discovered about 1,000 death groups (TSN, April 25, 2017). In early September 2019, media reported a new kind of death groups, now in the form of anime communities, with administrators encouraging children to commit suicide using anime (Japanese animation) images. The psychological tricks here are similar to those used by the Blue Whale administrators.

A survey we conducted among students of secondary schools shows that 81.8% of them are aware of the existence of death groups. The percentage of girls who know about such groups is slightly higher than that of boys (85.4% and 77.2%). The older the children, the more informed they are in this regard (75.8% among 12-year-olds and 86.4% among 17-year-olds). 16% say they have received offers to participate in extreme games while talking on social media. What is particularly concerning here is that 8.4% are willing to take part in such games while another 7.9% say they might consider it. This latter group, in our opinion, could be convinced to try it with professional psychological manipulation (Lubenets, 2020, p. 185).

Just like death groups, Internet challenges have become a popular form of entertainment among adolescents on social media that can lead to irreparable harm to the health and even life of a child. Challenges are a genre of Internet videos in which an influencer performs a certain action, records it on video, and uploads it, and then challenges friends or followers to do the same.

The most dangerous recent challenges include:

- fire challenge;
- tripping jump challenge;
- skull-breaker challenge;
- tide pods challenge;
- Momo suicide game;
- choking/fainting/pass-out challenge;
- blackout challenge;
- outlet challenge;
- Drake - "In My Feelings" challenge;
- pass out prank, shocking games, etc. (Osvita, 2021).

Displaying such acts on the Internet puts underage users at risk, since imitative suicidal behavior among adolescents stems from their tendency to copy the patterns of behavior they see around them, such as in the actions of people in their circle (friends, family, acquaintances), events covered by media and on the Internet, stories popular among teenage subcultures, etc.

As we have already mentioned, adolescents are highly suggestible, which explains cases of mass suicide. The phenomenon when a suicide widely covered by media or depicted in a popular book or film is followed by a wave of emulative suicides is referred to as the Werther effect, or Werther syndrome. This phenomenon was described in 1974-1975 by David Phillips, American sociologist from the University of California, San Diego, who studied the wave of emulative suicides that happened in Europe in late 18th century shortly after the publication of Goethe's popular novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (Kashcheyeva, April 15, 2016).

It should be mentioned that death groups and some of the challenges became popular mainly due to coverage by the media, including Internet media, and influencers, as well as through active discussion on social media among teenagers. Thus, it's not just the content circulated among these death groups that is dangerous, but also the content about them, about the way they operate (including pictures and videos on this subject) – such information is no less dangerous to children in a pre-suicidal state. In its Resource for Media Professionals, the WHO stresses the danger of

making suicide-related content easily accessible. Journalists are advised to adhere to certain rules when covering suicides:

- don't glorify or romanticize death;
- don't publish photos and suicide notes;
- don't give specifics regarding the method, circumstances, or location of the suicide;
- don't try to sensationalize suicides; avoid expressions like "epidemic of suicides," etc.;
- avoid covering high-profile suicides, especially where celebrities are involved;
- don't use religious or cultural stereotypes in descriptions (World Health Organization, 2006, p. 20; World Health Organization, 2017; Garkusha, 2021).

The need for these rules is illustrated in Katja Becker's work "Internet chat rooms and suicide" (2004), according to which the number of suicides increases in proportion to the number of outlets that cover it and the duration and popularity of the coverage. The author also stresses that suicide-related news are especially likely to cause new suicides among adolescents. Therefore, the rules for covering suicide-related events are necessary for the prevention of new suicides.

At the same time, we should not forget about the positive applications of the digital space, particularly for providing online assistance to adolescents experiencing personal crises, depression, or pre-suicidal state, or to those who recently attempted suicide. In some cases, online help could be even quicker and more effective than regular one. According to adolescents that have tried to commit suicide, it's easier for them to speak about their suicidal intentions on the Internet than face-to-face or on the phone. The darkest thoughts often visit them at night, and even though they desperately need someone to talk to in these moments, to unburden themselves, most of them don't want to wake their parents up or scare them with such conversations. This is why online consultations appeal to children more (Proulx, 2021).

Psychologists also believe that children who survived a suicide attempt could benefit from helping their peers deal with similar issues. Knowing that they were there for someone, that they were able to share some advice could help them overcome their own problems. It's the principle of helping yourself by helping others at work.

As for parents, rather than criticizing children for spending too much time online, it's better to ask

them what platforms they like and what kind of content they are interested in. This will help establish a real connection with the child, start a conversation about their problems, and possibly discover or prevent suicidal intentions.

Conclusion

To sum up, cybersuicide and related phenomena appeared with the invention of the Internet, which to this day is used as a tool for promoting suicidal behavior, including among adolescents.

Analysis of national and foreign studies on the impact of the digital space on adolescent suicidal behavior shows that suicide-related discussion forums, chats, and other Internet platforms serve to strengthen suicidal ideation and may ultimately drive a child to suicide.

The ease of access to the Internet and the rate at which information is shared online facilitate the promotion of suicide, drawing in adolescents who are among the most active Internet users. Active promotion of suicidal behavior on social media, messengers, forums, and other Internet platforms, as well as the ability to generate your own suicide-related content or become part of a “support” group – all this makes cybersuicide fashionable among adolescents. Propaganda of destructive behavior and suicidal ideas often relies on gamification, as in the case of Blue Whale, Red Owl, Wake Me Up at 4:20, and other death groups.

Since the media, including online media, play a significant role in the growing popularity of suicidal behavior, WHO guidelines for media professionals should be made mandatory by introducing a mechanism that would allow holding journalists responsible for violating these guidelines without violating freedom of speech.

Given how many different motives there can be for committing suicide, the content that adolescents post on their social media should be considered a potential indicator of suicidal or quasi-suicidal tendencies. This requires special attention for these adolescents from their parents and teachers, both in the context of providing psychological assistance and for facilitating and monitoring children’s cyber socialization and media security (Shchetinina, 2018).

An important thing to remember is when adolescents join suicide groups in the virtual world, they are actually looking for support. Therefore, we must organize and promote 24/7

online psychological help for children that are going through a crisis. Also, since in the virtual world adolescents mostly socialize within a circle of online “friends,” the key component of suicide prevention is their family’s attention, love, and involvement in their lives. Ultimately, many adolescents feel very lonely in the digital space.

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