COMMENTS.

Suicide in Children and Adolescents in Spain: The Blue Whale example

Pons, N.*

* Health Psychology Department. Miguel Hernández University.

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Sociodemographic Variables Most Associated with Suicidal Behaviour and Suicide Methods in Europe and America. A Systematic Review


La correspondencia de este artículo debe dirigirse a:
The correspondence of this article must be addressed to:

Nieves Pons Calatayud.
Departamento de Psicología de la Salud. Universidad Miguel Hernández.
Campus de San Juan.Ctra. Alicante-Valencia Km.87.
03550 San Juan de Alicante (Alicante). España.

E-mail: nieves.pons@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION.

Suicide has become the first fifteen causes of death in all ages and the second and third in the groups of 10-24 and 15-44 years respectively (Ministerio de Sanidad, Política Social e Igualdad, 2012). This data could be greater if we include the attempts, but fortunately not all attempts are consummated.

In Spain, the suicides have become from 2014 to 2016 the first cause of unnatural death, twice as many as died in road accidents, following the data of The National Statistics Institute (INE, 2017). In the same sense, 10 times more people die from suicide as domestic violence and it is the main cause of death among young people (Pérez Sola, 2016).

Taken into account the age, all over the world the majority of the cases are being committed consistently by people under 45 years old (WHO, 2014). Although we can find contradictory results about the rates of suicides in younger people, a recent systematic review (Cano-Montalbán & Quevedo-Blasco, 2018) has showed that once we include children from 10 years old we can find a greater percentage of suicides in younger people (33,3%) than in older people (26%). In different countries has been found a peak of suicides rates in people under 18 such us Canada (Brezo et al., 2007) or Cuba (Campa et al., 2012). In Mexico where the peak was found in the range of 15-17 years in general and between 14-19 years in women (Borges et al., 2009 y 2010). In Greece where the suicide was the 2nd form of death in people under 24 years, the majority of suicides were committed by male of 12-24 years or women of 16-22 years, being firearm, jumping from a height and hanging the methods most frequently used (Vougiouklakis et al., 2009).

It is important to notice that the rates of young people suicides have been increased over the last years and specifically in Europe has been multiplied by four (Ministerio de Sanidad, Política Social e Igualdad, 2012).

Specifically in Spain the suicide is the 3rd cause of death in young people between 15-29 years (after external reasons, like accidents or homicides, and tumours) (INE, 2017). The method chosen by our young people is hanging or similar (45.85%), followed by jumping from a height (30.56%) (INE, 2017). In the last years with the more frequent use of
technology the cyberbullying, sexting and other types of abuse by Internet have increased the number of suicides between young people (Le Blanc, 2012; Navarro Gómez, 2017).

Suicide is a behaviour with a huge emotional and economic impact for society. In Spain is still difficult to talk about it openly and most of the society prefers to avoid the problem and look in another direction (Navarro Gómez, 2017). The problem is that sometimes, looking around closely is the only way to try to stop a person (especially children or teens) of committing a suicide. There exist different “games” that encourage our young people to play with death, ignoring the risks of a real death. We can find games to try to see how long you can stay hanging yourself before stop, and of course we have lots of adolescents who die “playing” this “game”.

As an example of this kind of games, the “Blue Whale” (known as well as “F57” or “Wake up at 4:20” is one of the most dangerous games we can find in Internet that encourage children and adolescents to commit suicide by jumping from a height.

THE EXAMPLE OF BLUE WHALE GAME

Blue Whale has been created by a Russian ex-student of Psychology (expelled from his university when he was a student) called Philipp Budeikin. He decided that this society was full of weak people who are easily manipulated and the world would be better without them. His words were: “I want to clean this society from biological waste”. For this reason, he developed a “game” of 50 tasks that finish with the suicide of the player. Although the creator is in jail, the administrators of the game still are sending the game and the personalised tasks to the players through social networks. The administrators (called curators in the game) will contact the players by Whatsapp or Facebook or messenger giving one task every day and demanding a proof of the task made.

Hundreds of adolescents have committed suicide all over the world or, in the best cases, have been detected in a level more or less high of the game (Russia, Georgia, India, China, USA, Brazil, Argentina, Kenia, Portugal, Morocco, UK…). In Spain it was information about the game around April or May of 2017 when some cases of adolescents were reported. Fortunately, no cases of suicide have been reported in Spain. After that, no longer awareness has been made in Spain for the game, even
though there are still adolescents dying all over the world as a consequence of Blue Whale. The danger is still there although nobody talks about it.

The more we know about the game the more it is difficult for us to understand why our teens are willing to play a game that is going to kill them. Are they crazy? No. They are not weak or easily manipulated; they are just adolescents in transition of adult age full of confusion and trying to find themselves. They separate physically and emotionally from their loved ones and try to get new experiences. They spend a lot of time alone asking themselves transcendental questions and looking for their own limits. It is the best situation to take advantage of them. In this period of time threats of others, curiosity and the sense of invulnerability prepare the adolescents to do things that they will never do in another moment of their lives, like start playing Blue Whale. The main problem is that the way the game is planned makes it very difficult to stop once you start.

*The Tasks or Threats in Blue Whale*

The game consists in 50 tasks or threats that the player should perform and show the correspondent proof to the curator or administrator of the game.

They are planned to go from easy to really difficult threats until the last one, jump from the highest place you can and kill yourself. The self-injury, the exposition to feared stimulus are worked out, doing some steps typical in systematic desensitization (used in phobias treatments). One of the tasks is “climb to the highest rooftop you have access”, and later “stay as much as you can in the border of that rooftop”, after that “sit down with your legs hanging out”, etc. By this way the adolescent is gradually getting used to the height and getting ready for the last task (once other cognitive aspects have been worked out as well). Moreover, the game has “personalised tasks” that the curator gives to each player. So, the curator will demand something more or less difficult taken into account the proofs he/she has been sending, in order to be sure the player will get the tasks done (getting the reinforcement needed to keep on playing).

The player should finish one task everyday, so we have less than 50 days to realise what is happening with the adolescent who is playing around us to rescue him/her.
Some of the most frequent tasks are watching psychedelic and horror videos, listening to psychedelic music as well as videos and music that the curator sends to the players directly. All this watching and listening tasks are made early in the morning (4:20h). These repetitive tasks make that the adolescents may have hallucinations, cognitive and perceptive disturbances and a wide range of uncontrolled feelings due to the privacy of sleep together with the exposition to these stimulus. Being disturbed makes it difficult to keep reasonable and maintain self-control for the adolescents.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF BLUE WHALE

The game is aimed to adolescents and it contains some characteristics that made the game attractive for the adolescent’s eyes.

1) It is a clandestine game. At the beginning of the game the curator explains to them that they can’t tell anybody around them that he/she is playing the game and that once you start playing you can’t stop. However, the player should tell in the social networks that is playing and later on, contact and talk with other “whales” (players).

2) Feeling of belonging to a new group. Adolescents usually feel alone even among their classmates and family. They see themselves different to all people around them. The game gives then a “new group” to identify with. New people who decided, like he/she did, to play this game. When they talk, the social comparison process will begin making them compare how far they are in the game and making them willing to keep playing (“I can do it too”).

3) The attraction of the forbidden. Sometimes the most one thing is forbidden to us more attracted we feel to that thing. This doesn’t mean they are going to kill themselves because we say don’t do it, but they can start the game because they know they shouldn’t be playing. Temptation is powerful and they feel invulnerable as adolescents. After they start there will be other factors not expected by them that will make it really complicated to stop playing.

4) Personality treats: Risk Tendency. This is a factor associated to behaviours like the practice of risk sports or to addiction. The most is risk tendency the more luckily to accept a threat like the game proposes. Once the adolescents start the game (by curiosity or because wants to probe themselves) they will come into a situation that they can’t quid.
5) When the adolescents accept the first rule given by the administrator (once you start you can’t leave the game) a proof has been given and it will be used as a measure of pressure against him/her. Therefore, adolescents would feel that they have failed if they stop, so they keep on playing. If adolescents persist seriously about leaving the game, the administrator will threat their loved ones’ live (We are going to kill your mother, your sister…).

CONCLUSION.

The increasing number of suicides among young people all over the world could be related to some of the games the children and adolescents are playing. There are a lot of games who make them go to close to the death and they could die just by accident (without really meant it) during the game. Moreover, there are other games that are made to push them to kill themselves, like the Blue Whale Game that we have talked about.

The easy way to get connected to whatever social network through the mobile phone, computers and tablets, has been each time more difficult to protect our youngsters from some issues like these games. Furthermore, we need to really understand and pay attention to our adolescents. They are changing, but some of the changes should be alerting the adults around them. Lots of the cases where the adolescent were able to leave safely the game have been detected by teachers and familiars who noticed something and checked what was happening. Keeping a close eye on our young people and knowing about all these kinds of games it is the only way to prevent and stop a suicide.

Finally, it’s important to point out the game can’t be discharged by applications like Play Store, Google or similar, because it’s an .apk application. That makes it more difficult to be found, but adolescents can find it inside webpages or receive it directly through their social networks. There are ways to block the discharge of these kinds of applications and it could be deleted if it’s found in the mobile phone of any adolescent around us. We only need to pay attention to the adolescents and take control or supervision over the media they use.
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http://www.guiasalud.es/GPC/GPC_481_Conducta_Suicida_Avaliat_comp1.pdf


