

BLUE WHALE; A DANGEROUS CYBER SUICIDAL MOBILE GAME BY TEENAGERS: A TREMBLING CASE STUDY BY 50 TASKS IN 50 DAYS!

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present paper is to focus on new suicidal trend which is prevalent among adolescents when they are involved in a game i.e., blue whale game challenge. The paper would highlight the role of stress in directing adolescents towards this fatal challenge. Further authors would discuss the role of teachers and parents in saving adolescents from this challenge. The internet is an uncontrolled and uncensored entity so it makes hard to control all activities that young adults may indulge in. It is like a new addiction as everyone seems so busy and lost in this virtual world. Developers of such dangerous games are well aware of the vulnerabilities of the adolescents and know that they succumb to peer pressure easily. They are also well aware of the fact that teenagers nowadays are finding themselves unhappy, directionless, confused and lacking goals. With the growing trend of dangerous “killfie” and “blue whale challenge” it becomes important to spread awareness of the inherent hazards associated with them and adolescents considered themselves as of no use so they show physical as well as mental readiness to risk their lives simply for the sake of recognition and to prove their guts on a virtual forum. Data was collected from adolescents through interview, newspapers and internet etc. Findings of the study are discussed and suggestions for students, teachers and parents are given.

KEYWORDS: cyber suicide, blue whale, mobile, teens, kill fie.

INTRODUCTION

The "Blue Whale challenge" was reported to be an online "suicide game" aimed at teenagers which set 50 tasks over 50 days. The challenge was alleged to be linked to numerous deaths around the world. But little about the "game" was quite as it seemed. The first tasks were fairly innocuous: "**Wake up in the middle of the night**" or "**Watch a scary film**". But day by day, the tasks grew more sinister [unfortunate].^[1-3]

- "Stand on the ledge of a tower block."
- "Cut a whale into your arm."
- The final challenge? A demand that the user kill themselves.



Figure-1: Blue Whale game.

The challenge was alleged to have started in Russia, but reports of it soon spread to other countries: **Ukraine, India and the United States**. Hundreds of deaths were reported to be linked to the so-called "suicide game". But closer investigation has revealed something curious. The game, at least as it was initially reported, doesn't seem to have existed at all.

Origin story: The story of the Blue Whale challenge began with **Rina Palenkova**. On 22 November 2015, Rina, a teenager living in south-eastern Russia, posted a selfie. Rina Palenkova's death was discussed in a certain type of chat room hosted by Russia's largest social network VKontakte. These forums were places where teenagers met to talk about everyday things like school and which classmates they fancied, as well as darker subject matter: **depression, loneliness and suicide**.

Scary stories were exchanged. The spookiness of these stories came from how real they seemed, something often achieved through fake pictures or doctored footage. It is the online equivalent of the claim made by classic horror films that they are "based on true events".^[4]

Because at the heart of any good ghost story is a sliver of plausibility. It was in these groups, where the line between fact and fiction was often blurred, that users posted feverishly about Rina. In some instances, they lauded her for ending her life. Videos purporting to be her final moments were posted online. And shortly thereafter, Rina's story merged with other stories of teenage suicide. On Christmas Day 2015, 12-year-old **Angelina Davydova** killed herself in the Russian city of Ryazan. A little over a fortnight later, so did **Diana Kuznetsova**, a teenager from the same city. On November 23, 2015, 16-year-old Russian student **Renata Kambolina** died by suicide in Ussuriysk. Her death drew attention online, particularly her last post on VKontakte (where she went by the name Rina Palenkova), in which she wrote "*nya.bye*." Kambolina's death has influenced and been exploited by Russian "death groups" that encourage teenagers to take their own lives.^[5]



Figure-2: Rina Palenkova; first victim of dangerous cyber-suicide.

Born: December 18, 1998; Ussuriysk, Russia; Died: November 23, 2015 (aged 16); Ussuriysk, Russia

The “Blue Whale Challenge” has received a lot of media attention in India and rest of the world, but it was considered a hype as there was lack of any mention in the medical literature. Reported the first case where they mentioned about an adolescent boy who after downloading an application in his mobile started playing the game. This game was named by its creator, a Russian psychologist, who thought that a person with “no value” should commit suicide as does the whale which “strands” itself. When an individual or a group of marine mammals are washed ashore or in shallow water and cannot return itself, it is known as “stranding” which is believed to cause by disorientation due to naval use of sonars or naturally by earth's magnetic field. Many views “stranding” as a suicidal behavior and this is the basis of the name of the “Blue Whale Challenge.” This game consists of different tasks/challenges which has to be completed 50 tasks within 50 days and is monitored by an administrator. With completion of each task, subsequent task becomes more dangerous and the final challenge is to commit suicide. This report is about the first patient relating to “Blue Whale Challenge” reported to the psychiatry outpatient department, Gauhati Medical College Hospital, Guwahati, Assam, India, and possibly, the first reported case from Northeast India where the patient got an invitation while using the social media site “Facebook.”

XY is a 17-year-old boy of 11th standard. His class teacher noted a scar depicting a fish on his left forearm. The teacher reported the school authority who called the father and advised him to take the student for psychiatric assessment. There was a history of persistent low mood, low self-esteem, and loss of concentration for the last 4 years along with disturbed sleep. Father noted for the last 1 year that his son was irritable and would spend most of the time alone with his mobile. Patient reported that he was feeling ending up his life since the result of the last examination, which he failed, was announced and was exploring ways online to end up his life. When he came to know about the Blue Whale Challenge through social media site Facebook, he happily accepted the Challenge thinking that it will help him to commit suicide peacefully. According to the patient till date, he has accepted 40 challenges of the game, which included watching horror movies in the wee hours of the morning and making cut marks on his body with a sharp instrument. He accepted that completion of each challenge made him feel better and so he continued. On mental status examination, depressive cognition and suicidal ideation were found. Physical examination findings were within normal limits except figure of blue whale inscribed on the volar aspect of left forearm along with numerous visible healed scar marks of self-inflicted wounds on the surrounding skin. Diagnosis was severe depressive episode without psychotic symptoms as per ICD-10. ICD-10 is the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision, a standard system for coding diseases, symptoms, and other health conditions, published by the World Health Organization (WHO). It uses alphanumeric codes to classify health information for mortality (death) statistics, morbidity (disease) data, and claims processing. The U.S. uses a version called ICD-10-CM for diagnosis codes and ICD-10-PCS for procedure codes, developed by the CDC and CMS to fit U.S. healthcare needs.

A global coding system: ICD-10 provides a universal language for health information, allowing for standardized classification and consistent reporting of health and mortality data worldwide.

A classification of diseases: It categorizes diseases, signs, symptoms, and abnormal findings, providing a standardized way to document health issues.^[6]

A tool for public health: The system helps researchers and public health officials track diseases and health outcomes more effectively by providing detailed information, such as the cause of a condition or its precise location on the body. He was admitted and prescribed mirtazapine and clonazepam considering available literature showing their efficacy. Blood investigations were within normal limits. Cognitive behavioral therapy and eclectic family therapy were also started. There is an emerging phenomenon of “**cybersuicide**,” and the youths are particularly at high risk. “Cybersuicide” refers to the use of the Internet for matters relating to suicide and its ideation. Vulnerable youths are lured by these websites. Thereby, they acquire different ways of intentionally harming self. The recent phenomenon of the Blue Whale Challenge is only one of them. Although any adolescent may attempt to explore the challenge out of a sense of curiosity or adventure, those with underlying depressive episode or other psychiatric morbidity are at the maximum risk of engaging actively in it. Children grown up in abusive environment or dysfunctional families, where attachment and appreciation are lacking, may be prone to such addictive games. It is important to note that along with physical hygiene, gadget hygiene needs to be ensured. Mental healthcare providers should counsel patients, particularly adolescents, and their guardians, about the immediate steps at the time of crisis: removal of the gadget, exploring alternatives to surfing the web and providing an understanding attitude. Help may also be available by calling crisis lines, friends, or family members. Clinical treatment for the psychiatric morbidity should be initiated without delay.

Restriction in one method of suicide does not necessarily lead the attempters to try another. Therefore, awareness among clinicians about this new method of suicide as well as involving the family members in the treatment team can go a long way in preventing suicide in the vulnerable young population.

Blue Whale Challenge also known simply as the Blue Whale, is a social network phenomenon dating from 2016 that is claimed to exist in several countries. It is a “game” reportedly consisting of a series of tasks assigned to players by administrators over a 50-day period, initially innocuous before introducing elements of self-harm and the final challenge requiring the player to commit suicide.^[7]

Global case study

- **Armenia:** According to news reports, the cause of death of 15-year-old **Hrachya Nersisyan**, who died by suicide, was the game “Blue Whale”. According to the head of the department for the Protection of Minors' Rights and Combating Domestic Violence of the Main Criminal Investigation Department of the Armenian Police, Nelly Duryan, the Armenian segment of the Internet is flooded with messages about this “game”, but there are no final conclusions on this issue yet.
- **Australia:** Although no reports of suicides in Australia have been linked to the game, an investigation by an Australian journalist on Kidspot reportedly confirmed the existence of the game.
- **Bangladesh:** Despite many news reports published in Bangladeshi media attempting to link suicides with the game, no case has been officially confirmed. In October 2017, Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan stated that the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission has been directed to investigate the Blue

Whale game after reports of suicide around the country. BTRC released a notice urging people to call a specific number if any web link or any information related to the Blue Whale game were to be found. Later that month, the Bangladeshi High Court ordered a six-month ban on special night-time internet packages provided by various mobile operators across the country.

- **Brazil:** Despite several news reports in Brazilian media linking cases of child self-harm and suicide with Blue Whale and several ongoing investigations, none have been officially confirmed. In response to the game, a designer and a publicity agent from São Paulo created a movement called Baleia Rosa (Pink Whale), which became popular. It relied on the collaboration of hundreds of volunteers. The movement was based on positive tasks that value life and combat depression. Another movement, the Capivara Amarela (Yellow Capybara), was created by Sandro Sanfelice, and proposed to "combat the Blue Whale game" and guide people seeking some kind of help. Participants were separated into either challengers, who are the people who need guidance, or healers, who are a kind of sponsor to the challengers. An Adventist school in southern Paraná, in partnership with other education networks, also sought to reverse the situation by proposing another charity game, the "Jonas Challenge" (referring to the biblical character Jonah, who was swallowed by a whale and vomited up three days later). Other games created in Brazil in response to the Blue Whale were the Baleia Verde (Green Whale) and the Preguiça Azul (Blue Sloth). In Belo Horizonte and Recife metropolitan area in Brazil, many schools promoted lectures to talk about the Blue Whale game. On May 21, 2017, it was announced that the Brazilian police Specialized in High Technology Crime Repression in Piauí were preparing a digital primer to warn young people about the dangers of the game.
- **Bulgaria:** The first media reports of the game in Bulgaria appeared in mid-February 2017. However, the game was dismissed as a hoax by the Georgi Apostolov Centre.
- **Chile:** The first alleged case of the game in Chile was reported in April 2017 in Antofagasta, after a 12-year-old girl was seen with 15 cuts on her arm, which formed a "whale".
- **China:** In May 2017, Tencent, China's largest Internet service portal, closed 12 suspicious Blue Whale-related network groups on its social networking platform QQ. It said that the number of this kind of groups is on the rise. The search results of related keywords were also blocked.^[8]
- **Egypt:** In April 2018, Egyptian news sources claimed a 12-year-old schoolboy had killed himself by taking poisonous tablets to fulfill one of the challenges of the game. According to the media, the schoolboy was found with a scar in the shape of a blue whale on his right arm. In reaction to the growing media awareness of the game, Egypt's Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyyah uploaded a video on their YouTube channel claiming that the game is forbidden in Islam, and warning against it.
- **Germany:** In 2017, a 13-year-old girl from Radevormwald, North Rhine-Westphalia was reported to have scratched a blue whale on her arm as part of the game. The game was allegedly found on her phone.
- **India:** Throughout 2017, media in India reported several cases of child suicide, self-harm and attempted suicide alleged to be a result of Blue Whale, and in response, the Indian government's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, requested that several internet companies (including Google, Facebook, and Yahoo!) remove all links which direct users to the game. Some commentators accused the government of creating a moral panic. The Indian internet watchdog Centre for Internet and Society accused the coverage of effectively spreading and advertising a "game" for which there is little evidence. The Supreme Court asked the Indian Central government to ban the game, following which the government responded that since Blue Whale wasn't an

application, it couldn't be banned. For a period of time several internet providers blocked Russian social network VKontakte over concerns about the "game" believed to originate on this Russian social network.

- Finally in January 2018, after a full investigation the government reported there was no evidence that any death was as a result of Blue Whale saying "The committee analysed the internet activities, device activities, call records and other social media activity, other forensic evidences and also interacted with rescued victims associated with these incidents. Involvement of Blue Whale challenge game in any of these incidents could not be established."
- **Iran:** In September 2017, the Iranian Minister of Information and Communications Technology posted a message in his official Instagram account to warn parents and teachers about the spread of the Blue Whale challenge among Iranian teens.
- **Italy:** In Italy, press coverage of "Blue Whale" first appeared on 3 June 2016, in the newspaper La Stampa, which described the challenge as "a bad joke". The debunking site BUTAC reported the total lack of evidence to affirm the game's existence. On 14 May 2017, a TV report by Le Iene about 'Blue Whale' on the national channel Italia linked the challenge to an unconnected suicide in Livorno. The report showed several suicide scenes, mostly from videos on LiveLeak depicting adults unrelated to the challenge. It incorrectly described the footage as evidence of teenagers playing the game. The report interviewed a schoolmate of the Livorno teenager, two mothers of Russian girls who supposedly took part in the game, and the founder of the Russian Center for the safety of children from internet crimes. Following the report, coverage of the challenge in the Italian media increased, with many outlets describing it as real. There was a sharp rise in Google searches for the challenge, and some panic. On 15 and 16 May, newspapers announced the arrest of Budeikin, without saying that it happened months before. His unconfirmed statements about his supposed victims being "genetical rubbish" were reported as real. Paolo Attivissimo, a journalist and debunker of hoaxes, described the game as "a death myth dangerously exaggerated by sensationalist journalism". Police received calls from terrified parents and teachers, and there were reports of teenagers taking part in the challenge. These included several cases of self-mutilation and attempted suicide. Most reports were considered to be false or exaggerated. Alleged participants were reported from all over Italy: Ravenna, Brescia and Siracusa. On 22 May 2017, the Polizia Postale stated they had received 40 reports. On 24 May they raised the number to 70. On its website the Polizia Postale defines Blue Whale as "a practice that seems to possibly come from Russia" and offers advice to parents and teenagers. Several alleged cases have since been described by newspapers.^[9]
- **Israel:** In July 2020, the Israeli Child Online Protection Bureau had announced they are collaborating with TikTok to "eradicate the Blue Whale phenomenon".
- **Kenya:** **Jamie Njenga**, a 16-year-old boy who attended JG Kiereini Secondary School in Kiambu County, Kenya, hung himself with a rope from the balcony of his home, according to his grandfather John Njenga. He was reported to have played the game on his phone, which was seized by police following his suicide. This was the first suicide in Kenya to be linked to the game. Because of this, the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) banned the game in Kenya, and wrote to all internet service providers (ISP) in Kenya and to numerous other major social media platforms and tech companies (including Facebook, Google, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube) to ensure that all links to the game are blocked in Kenya.
- **New Zealand:** Although no suicides in New Zealand have been linked to the game, New Zealand Police have issued warnings about the game.
- **Paraguay:** A 22-year-old student, **Federico Pedro Aguilera**, was found dead with a stab wound to his chest in

Coronel Bogado, Paraguay, with his death linked to the game. This was the first suicide in Paraguay to be linked to the game.

- **Portugal:** At least eight suicides in Portugal have been linked to the game, though many of the reports involved foreign individuals as opposed to Portuguese residents.
- **Russia:** In March 2017, authorities in Russia were investigating approximately 130 separate cases of suicide related to the phenomenon. In February a 15-year-old and 16-year-old threw themselves off the top of a 14-story building in Irkutsk, Siberia after completing 50 tasks sent to them. Before they killed themselves together, they left messages on their pages on social networks. Also in February, a 15-year-old was in critical condition after throwing herself out of an apartment and falling on snow-covered ground in the town of Krasnoyarsk, also in Siberia. On 26 May 2017, the Russian Duma passed a bill introducing criminal responsibility for creating pro-suicide groups on social media and in June 2017, President Putin signed a law imposing criminal penalties for inducing minors to suicide. The law imposes a maximum punishment of six years in prison.
- **Saudi Arabia:** On 15 July 2018, the Saudi General Commission for Audio-Visual Media banned 47 video games, including Grand Theft Auto V, Assassin's Creed II and The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt, which had online components that were alleged to be part of the Blue Whale game following the suicides of two teenagers that had been involved in it.
- **Spain:** In 2018, the first suicide in Spain allegedly linked to the game was reported, after a 14-year-old girl from Gipuzkoa, Basque Country committed suicide and acknowledged that she played the game. Although she initially did not intend to complete all 50 challenges (the last being to commit suicide), she ended up killing herself, stating that the perpetrators could be found "in Barcelona and in Argentina".
- **Tunisia:** On 12 March 2018, the parents of seven Tunisian children who claimed their children had killed themselves due to the game requested a ban on Blue Whale from the Tunisian courts. A trial court in Sousse issued an interim judgment prohibiting Blue Whale and another supposed similar game named "Miriam".
- **United States:** Many schools in the United States have warned parents about the game, though the number of Americans reported to have committed suicide because of the game has been low. In 2017, a San Antonio teenager was found hanging dead at his home. Many observers, including family members, linked his suicide to the game. It was the first suicide in the United States to have been linked to the game. However, the San Antonio Police Department did not mention the game in its report of his suicide.
- **Uruguay:** In Uruguay, the game has been linked to suicides in at least six departments: Canelones, Colonia, Montevideo, Rio Negro, Rivera and Salto.
- **Venezuela:** In January 2019, a 15-year-old boy committed suicide at his home in Vargas, Venezuela after allegedly playing the game.

Dangerous tasks: 1. Carve f57 on arm with the blade. It is in the name of death and suicide group in Russia. 2. Wake up at 04:20 am listening depressing songs and watching scary movies. 3. Cutting arm along with veins (three cuts). 4. Drawing whale on a piece of paper. 5. If the player agrees to become a whale, write yes with the help of blade on the leg. If not ready to do this then cut many times as punishment. 6. The task is in the code sent by curators to the players. 7. Carve „f40“ with a blade on the arm. It is on the name of another death and suicide group in Russia. 8. Put status #I_am_Whale. 9. To overcome fear. 10. To get up at 04:20 am and go to the roof. 11. To make a drawing of the whale on the hand. 12. To watch scary videos all day. 13. To listen to the music sent by game administrators. 14. To cut lip.

15. To poke with the needle arm. 16. To hurt oneself. 17. To go to the highest roof one can find and to stand on the edge. 18. To climb on a crane or at least try to do this. 19. To go to the bridge and stand on its edge. 20. Trustworthiness is checked by the curators of the challenge. 21. To talk with another whale (someone who is also playing the game) on skype. 22. To sit down on the edge of the roof with feet dangling. 23. Another task is hidden in a code send by curators. 24. Secret task. 25. To meet with a whale. 26. Curators tell the time and date of your death and one has to accept it. 27. To wake up at 04:20 am and go to any railroad or track of adolescent's area. 28. Not to talk with anyone. 29. To take an oath that adolescent is a whale.^[10]

Chemistry: There is no known link between the hormone oxytocin and a "blue whale disaster"; this appears to be a misunderstanding, as "Blue Whale" also refers to the "Blue Whale Challenge," a dangerous social media phenomenon that is separate from the blue whale animal. While oxytocin plays a role in social bonding and anti-stress effects in mammals, including potential benefits for blue whales' social and maternal connections, its function is not tied to the human-originated "Blue Whale" game or any specific disaster affecting the animal population.

Understanding the Terminology

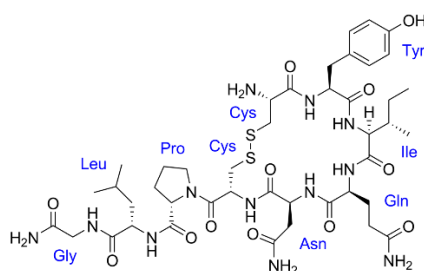


Figure-3: Oxytocin as nona-peptide.

Oxytocin's Role: In mammals, oxytocin is a hormone associated with social bonding, trust, and maternal behaviors, such as milk let-down and uterine contractions. It can also have anti-stress effects. Oxytocin is a nona-peptide [9 amino acids] hormone and neuropeptide normally produced in the hypothalamus and released by the posterior pituitary.

Blue Whale (Animal): These are the endangered marine mammals facing threats from human activities like ship strikes and noise pollution.

Blue Whale (Game): This refers to a social media phenomenon, or "game," that emerged around 2016, involving a series of tasks for players, culminating in a challenge for self-harm or suicide.

Why There's No Connection

Different Subjects: The connection you're asking about is likely a conflation of the biological hormone oxytocin and the blue whale animal with the internet-based "Blue Whale Challenge".

No Evidence: There is no scientific research or evidence linking the hormone oxytocin to any negative outcome or "disaster" involving actual blue whales. Instead, oxytocin is generally seen as beneficial for social animals.

In summary, the concept of oxytocin affecting a "blue whale disaster" seems to stem from a misunderstanding between the hormone, the animal, and the infamous online game, which are entirely unrelated.

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