

THE RISKS TO WHICH CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED IN THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: *In contemporary times, the cyberspace is the environment where socialization takes place, especially for children. In this context, a new form of violence among students, cyberbullying, also known as "internet aggression," has emerged. It is characterized by harassment mediated through electronic forms of contact (mobile phones, computers, laptops, tablets, email, blogs, instant messaging, etc.), particularly prevalent among adolescents. The purpose of this work is to highlight aspects related to the "dark side" of internet usage. Anonymity and disinhibition facilitated by the virtual environment can lead people to say and do things that they wouldn't in real life. The main objective is to detail how online violence has intensified and how harsh it has become. Malice has become an accepted reality, and the conditions of the online environment can turn cruelty into a "competitive sport," with posts quickly escalating in some cases from offense to insult or sadism. Sadistic teasing of children and adolescents represents a "sick sport" for trolls. In the virtual environment, children can interact with "pathological strangers" who take advantage of their innocence and manipulate them, either for amusement or for other equally malicious purposes. The article presents risky games for children, such as the Blue Whale, the Russian Coin, and other challenges they may be exposed to online. Our goal is to underscore the need for clear and well-defined norms regarding the way we use this 'tool,' which is the internet.*

Keywords: virtual environment, cyberbullying, suicide, Blue Whale Game

1. Introduction

Cyberpsychology represents a new emerging subdiscipline within applied psychology that studies digital psychology. It emerged in the late 1990s, with a primary focus on investigating the relationships between individuals and technologies. It analyzes and understands how this interaction influences human behaviour and functioning. In other words, it explores how we communicate through technological devices, how we use them, and with what motivations and intentions. Additionally, it aims to uncover how this interaction modifies or alters our way of thinking, feeling, and behaving, among other factors involved (Robaina, 2022: 17-19).

Cyberpsychology primarily addresses the main risks and repercussions of this type of interaction in virtual environments and beyond, in offline situations. This new field of study utilizes specific studies from other related disciplines, including educational psychology, social psychology, forensic psychology, health psychology, consumer psychology, or psychopathology. These disciplines apply and adapt various theories to understand and explain psychosocial processes and human behaviour characteristics underlying the interconnection with technologies. The interaction between "person-technology" is practically examined in a holistic manner, taking into account the context of this integration, in contexts such as education, leisure time, health, and interpersonal relationships. It has been defined by the Cyberpsychology Section of the British Psychological Society as "an interdisciplinary scientific field that focuses on psychological phenomena resulting from human interaction with digital technology, especially the internet" (Robaina, 2022: 17).

The bullying phenomenon has always been present in student dynamics, with aggressions often being "hidden." However, with the advent of computers, and implicitly email and social networking, the phenomenon has gained a new dimension. Harassment is an "extreme form of aggressiveness among children, where a stronger student intentionally and repeatedly aggresses and intimidates one or more colleagues more vulnerable than him" (Mennuti, Christner and Freeman, 2016: 319).

Maurice Cusson emphasizes that students in Quebec have coined the ironic term 'taxation' for their racket, meaning 'extortion of goods through intimidation or using force' (Cusson, 2006, p. 95). The criminologist uses the term "terrorism" for bullying, describing a situation where "the same student is the subject of repetitious outrages," indicating a report of persecution in which the aggressor repeatedly harasses, humiliates, and steals from the victim, and the repeated intimidation becomes terrorization (Palaghia, 2016).

Vulnerability is certainly not exclusive to children, as adults become victims in various situations, both at work and elsewhere (Palaghia, 2019a). Vulnerability "characterizes not only certain populations but also each individual found in certain relationships with external reality, with some social contexts of individual action, and can be a result of the individual interpretations given to these contexts" (Cojocaru, 2005: 30-31). The same author concludes: "If we propose to identify vulnerable populations, we must recognize both the individual and collective actions that lead to the manifestation of vulnerability" (Cojocaru, 2002: 130). As victims appear to others as insecure individuals, especially passive and unable to react when they are attacked, the aggressors choose their victims especially among children who do not complain and who appear to be physically and emotionally weaker, being tempted to look for colleagues' attention. Student victims generally have parents or teachers who are overly caring, and as a result, they fail to develop strategies to deal with conflicting situations (Palaghia, 2019 b, 2021c).

Many victims seek approval from their aggressors, even after facing rejection. Some continue attempting to interact with the aggressor. Most of the times, the student victims are solitary, have no friends, and are attracted as a magnet by their aggressive peers who satisfy their need for power by aggression. Of course, there are cases where students can be victims of their colleagues because they are simply „different“, either physically or mentally handicapped, or belonging to another ethnic or other religion etc., also indicating cases in which aggressive students focus on a particular colleague for no particular reason, but the victim remains with the impression that something is wrong with her and remains with the tendency to be blaming themselves (Palaghia, 2021b).

Katzer (2018) analyzes how the Internet changes the human behaviour, and she states that individuals can free themselves from their true identity and take on a different role in this environment. The author presents the concepts of cybermobbing and cyberstalking, characterized by the fact that online marginalization, mobbing, and stalking have taken on a new dimension in cyberspace because the videos made with a mobile phone may be posted in a few seconds, which can show aggression, such as a girl being raped in the gym, the image of a schoolmate in the toilet, a young man being beaten in the school yard or in another space where he is lured, or nude photos, sometimes fake, which can be made available to the general public on social networks or on video portals, so that they are accessible to hundreds of thousands of Internet users. The victims feel that they can no longer find a corner where to be protected and carry their cybermobbers "with them in their pockets on their smartphones" (Katzer, 2018: 92), in which the aggressors enter directly into the space where the victim is at any moment, so the consequences are much more serious than in the case of traditional mobbing.

Outlining a dynamic of the victim-aggressor relationship specific to the bullying phenomenon, traditional or cyber, we can specify whether abusers lack empathy and ferocity, they are usually dominant and strong in the peer group, whereas victims become anxious, they do not trust themselves, they get isolated, they no longer interact with anyone, there are situations when they choose not to go to school for fear of meeting the abusers again. However, the worst consequences are the ways in which victims turn their aggression to themselves by self-mutilation or even suicide. The cyber victim is an isolated person, with low self-esteem, strongly focused on networking and disconnected from the real world, which is exploited by aggressors who take every opportunity to mock him/her. Parents who are overly caring and give their children too much may expose them to cybermobbing. The reasons why adults and

children end up cybermobbing are different. In the case of adults, it is about envy and rigid hierarchies at work whereas the triggering factors are restructuring processes at work, therefore, the fear of change or losing their job but also boredom and pure pleasure play a very important role. The adolescents' own satisfaction is on the first place of the etiological approach; they develop a pleasure to harm others, or out of boredom and lack of occupation they seek, recognition from other Internet users, who can reward them by "click", "share", etc. It is also possible to develop a competition among colleagues who have the most embarrassing and degrading videos about another schoolmate. Another triggering factor for aggression may be the desire for revenge, as a victim of traditional bullying can transform into a ferocious aggressor in the virtual environment (Palaghia, 2021c).

From February to March 2017, the Romanian media reported 'a wave' of suicides. However, in Russia alone, over 130 deaths occurred among teenagers who chose to play a deadly game called 'Blue Whale.' In Romania, specialists sought help from parents and teachers through TV channels and police websites to raise awareness. Parents were advised to 'pay special attention to how their children spend time online' to prevent the consequences of this game. Additionally, there was a 'prevention week' during which students, parents, and teachers discussed 'safety in the online environment.' The game came under the scrutiny of the Control Commission of the Romanian Intelligence Service, recognized as the only institution capable of taking appropriate measures (Palaghia, 2018).

At the beginning of 2018, the death games spread to the USA, Mexico, and other states. They were almost forgotten in Romania until recently when, on September 6, 2021, the media reported that a 14-year-old girl from Cotu Miculinți village, Coțușca commune, Botoșani county, committed suicide after participating in a suicide game (Palaghia, 2021 a). The police did not confirm hypotheses but seized the girl's devices for the investigation. Representatives of DGASPC revealed that the teenager's parents were working abroad, and she was being looked after by an uncle. She came from a good family and was well cared for. Following this news, articles in the media warned parents that the phenomenon of suicide games had not been eradicated, and there are always 'leaders who find pleasure in the pain of children' (www.ziare.com, September 9, 2021).

Subsequently, there was the Russian Coin game in which children participated by spinning a coin on a hard surface, aiming to keep it spinning as long as possible. The child who failed to keep the coin moving was 'punished' by other children, who hit their hands with the coin. The game gained public attention after being shared on TikTok, where clips depict pupils of various ages with visible injuries on their hands. Nationally, campaigns have been launched to prevent such games that promote physical and emotional violence against children (bzi.ro, bzb.ro, ziare.com, November 25, 2022).

2. Suicide among victims of (cyber)bullying is a real problem.

Suiciding is a "worrying phenomenon to any society, has an even more alarming impact nowadays" (Stan, 2021, p. 144). In recent years, particularly in the United States of America, the media have highlighted the causes of suicide among victims of cyberbullying, signaling an extremely concerning phenomenon where victims are portrayed as being harassed 'until death.' Names like Rebecca Sedwick, Kristina Arielle Calco, Amanda Todd, and many others represent teenagers who took their own lives due to cyberbullying. Additionally, isolated cases of suicide among children, initially attributed to misunderstandings with parents, have emerged. Later, especially in the context of the pandemic, an increasing number of suicide cases or attempts among students have been reported, coinciding with a rise in reports of cyberbullying. The severity of both cyberbullying and traditional bullying began to be more widely recognized (Palaghia, 2018)

Openshaw (2008: 234) states that 'suicide is the second leading cause of death among children and adolescents. People who contemplate suicide are frequently ambivalent about killing themselves and usually respond to help. This is because people who have a suicide plan

may not want to die but only to be free from their current situation, and suicide seems to be their only viable option. Suicidal students often try to communicate their feelings indirectly prior to attempting suicide.

During the conference organized and presented by Gabriela Alexandrescu of Save the Children, titled 'The Dramatic Consequences of the Pandemic,' it was revealed that anxiety among students became more frequent during the pandemic. There were increasing cases of aggression both in schools and in the online environment, leading to numerous suicide attempts among children who felt they had no other solution to escape bullying and/or cyberbullying than by taking their own lives. The presentation included the case of a sixth-grade student, a victim of bullying, who jumped out of a school window. Shockingly, some of his classmates even encouraged him to do so.

The study 'The Impact of the Pandemic on the Socio-Emotional Health of Children,' conducted by the organization Save the Children, reveals that more than 90% of recent diagnoses made by psychologists were attributed to the pandemic context. Ignored children and those living in poor economic conditions are the most affected, especially given the suspension of social and medical services in the same context. The study also highlights that primary school students felt the negative impact of isolation more strongly, while teenagers experienced feelings of loneliness, sadness, or anger.

Durkheim defined suicide as 'any case of death that results directly or indirectly from a direct or indirect act, positive or negative, committed by the victim himself, and of which he knows what result it will produce. The attempt is the act thus defined but stopped before death occurs' (Durkheim, 1897: 13). The sociologist delineated the etiological elements of violence against oneself and stated: 'People commit suicide because they suffered family troubles or disappointments in their own love, sometimes because they were poor or ill, sometimes because they blamed themselves for a moral mistake, etc.' (Durkheim, 1897: 307). While Durkheim did not consider circumstances as 'determining causes of the preceding act,' the renowned sociologist recognized their important role in the decision-making process.

The act of suicide is defined by some authors as 'escape behaviour - the ultimate escape,' through which an individual 'gets out of a critical situation that causes unbearable suffering.' Suicide is also outlined as an aggressive act directed toward oneself (Neamțu, 2003: 249). There is a diversity of 'motivations' and circumstances that can 'precipitate the option for the suicidal act,' but research has shown common characteristics of suicides. For instance, 'the purpose of any suicide is to find a solution'; it is not a random act but a way to solve a problem. The child may not identify another solution and wants 'to end the suffering, or at least not to be aware of it anymore.' Mental suffering stimulates any act of this kind, as 'the suffering of becoming aware of suffering is severe suffering' (Neamțu, 2003: 251).

Among the risk factors for suicide in children, we mention 'early affective frustration,' the lack of parental attachment, which determines 'the absence of affective identification,' as well as 'feelings of insecurity and anxiety in cases of authority abuse,' which can trigger the fear of not being sanctioned. In Romania, there are also 'pseudo-suicides,' unpremeditated acts of children that have a playful and imitating character. In adolescence, any suicidal act may be based on conflicting states 'impregnated by intense affective experiences.' Suicide by imitation and 'protest suicide' involve factors from family, school, social, and personality domains. Risk situations include the death of a loved person, wrong communication with the family, acute stress periods, and conflict situations, among others.

3. "Blue whale", a simple game or cyberbullying?

The suicide games first appeared in Russia, and in a short time they spread among teenagers in Ukraine and the Transnistrian region, then, in quite a short time, it resulted in the death of about 200 children. Over 130 teenagers committed suicide from November 2015 to May 2016 in Russia alone because of death games, of which the most publicized was the one called "Blue Whale". In the Republic of Moldova, the first case was registered on 8th March 2017

when two teenagers jumped from a 16-story building. This was not the only virtual game that encouraged suicide, there were also "Quiet House", "Wake me up at 04:20", "Run or Die", "50 days until...", "f57 – f58", "Niapoca", "Sea of Whales"; all of them asked players to complete 50 missions that resulted in suicide.

The creator of this game is Filipp Budeikin, a young man aged 21. "It all started in December 2013, when the young man moved near Moscow created on the social network vKontakte, a kind of Russian Facebook, the first group of death, called "F57". Hundreds of teenagers were curious or vulnerable because of some personal problems, so they answered to the invitation of the unknown "Filipp Lis" and entered his virtual game. Some of them insisted on going to the end and died of their own free will," because the Blue Whale was a diabolical game that could be won only by the suicide of the one who had begun to play it (<http://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/cine-e-tanarul-ainventat-balena-albastra-jocul-mortii-index.html>), accessed on 19.03.2017).

We are presenting below a publicized fragment of the answers that Filip gave to a reporter, in which he referred to the victims of these games and the motivation that made him start them:

Reporter: "Do you really push young people to kill themselves?"

Budeikin: "Yes! Don't worry, you will understand. Everyone understands. They die happy. I give them everything they can't have in real life: warmth, understanding and communication".

"It all started in 2013. I wanted to clean the world of the people who harm the society. I created the F57. And it attracted people. In 2014, it was banned. Later, I thought about the project, the concept, in different phases and levels".

"The game begins. It is necessary for the tasks to be carried out, so I talk to them about themselves, we communicate. During this dialogue, it becomes clear who is who. Then I start a conversation on Skype to find out more about their lives. Then I make the decision. The more tired the teenager is and does not sleep at night, the more accessible his mind becomes".

Speaking about a victim: "He was a student. He only had one parent, they were poor, his mother used to beat him, and in his free time he killed dogs. So it was better for everyone, especially for him."

Among the family factors of the deviant behaviour, Associate Prof. Dr. Mihaela Rădoi PhD. mentions the disorganized family that can be: "the incompletely united or illegitimate family, the family broken up by the departure of one of the spouses, after the annulment of the marriage, separation, divorce or abandonment, the family of the type "empty home", where the spouses live together without real communication and without being an emotional support for each other, the family in crisis, due to the absence of one of the spouses by: death, detention, illness, the existence of situations that determine the failures of the marital behaviour, caused by certain types of deficiencies or ailments, either of the children or of one or both spouses" (Rădoi, 2015: 95).

Among the testimonies of people who knew the young man and his family, there were frequent arguments and misunderstandings among its members, and they were described as a problem family: "The family of this young man originally lived in Uhta, a town in the Republic of Komi. Filipp grew up there with his two elder brothers, Denis and Evghenii, with the frequent arguments of his mother. "The relations between the members of this family were very tense. The mother scolded her sons almost every week, even in front of strangers. The brothers rarely spoke to each other. Filipp was very reserved, and sometimes he had to be pushed to say something. When he walked on the street, it was as if he did not even see the others. He was very angry most of the time", said a neighbour who described "a strange family". According to life.ru, he studied in a class of troubled students and did not make any friends because of his aggressiveness. Later, he was admitted to a vocational school. He moved to Solnecinogorsk with his mother in 2012. Once he got there, he was suddenly interested in the Internet and books about information technologies. He would have tried to find a job, but he did not succeed. Gradually, his life became increasingly virtual. All his acquaintances and all his projects were

behind a computer monitor" (<http://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/cine-e-tanarul-ainventat-balena-albastra-jocul-mortii-/index.html>, accessed on 19.03.2017).

When Budeikin was asked about his first victim, who was a 16-year-old girl with the pseudonym Rina Palenkova, who committed suicide on 23rd November 2015, while taking a selfie, refused to answer the question: "What did the girl do wrong?" and he only said that she was part of a cult.

The children who are very exposed and at risk in front of such "games" are the ones who "sit quietly" in front of the monitor, by accessing Internet sites unknown to the parents who should constantly monitor the children's behaviour such as: the addiction to internet, the lack of appetite, the lack of sleep etc. The introverted children are at risk of depression and anxiety, so they became extremely vulnerable to the wrong-doers.

The obligations of the player were not easy and the consequences were extremely harmful for a still young mind such as that of a child. He had to scratch all kinds of words and drawings on his skin, he had to watch horror movies and to wake up at unusual hours at night.

The messages received on the phone contained the following words that aimed at attracting in the game (According to the producer of the show "Special B1" broadcast on the B1 channel, on 18.03.2017):

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| Curator: "Are you a girl? Are your friends betraying you? Did your boyfriend leave you? Do you often listen to sad music? Subscribe to "Upstream Whales!" |
| Victim: "I want to play the game" |
| Curator: "Are you sure? There is no going back." |
| Victim: "Yes. What does that mean, no way back?" |
| Curator: "You can't leave the game once it starts!" |
| Victim: "I'm ready!" |
| Curator: "You will carry out every task carefully and no one must know about it. When you have finished a task, send me a photo, and at the end of the game you will die. Are you ready?" |
| Victim: "What if I want to go out?" |
| Curator: "I have all the information about you. They will come after you!" |

An analysis of the conversation reveals the fact that the Curator stimulated his victim to identify with the target group and the child had the impression that he was going with people just like him who could understand him. For the child, everything is a game, he understands it as being for his age and the idea of the game is attractive to him. "Although it seems quite absurd and we can look at these phenomena with some reluctance, especially because it is not very clear how the manipulation in the game can result in such disastrous results, we must take into account the fact that we are dealing with young minds, who grow up and can be sensitive to even the smallest dangers and temptations, especially if the latter offer them the attention and warmth that they do not normally have in their lives. The game is simple but its implications are more serious. Upon the registration, the participant starts to be monitored by an administrator, who "guides" him through the tasks he has and will "help" him to fulfill his "obligations". These are not obligations in the real meaning of the word, because no one is tied by the hands and feet, and forced to do those actions on themselves, but the game does not give them many options. The administrator constantly reminds them that once they started the game, there is no way to escape, and when the players hesitate to do what is asked of them, he resorts to threats against them and their families. It is quite difficult to look at the trees, if we are fascinated by the image of the forest. Thus, no matter how much we invoke the freedom of the players, so their possibility to evade the imposed tasks, we must take into account that here we are dealing with a kind of limited freedom, also called the freedom of the slave. Basically, the players have two options: either they do what they are asked to, or they die" (<https://playtech.ro/2017/balena-albastra-cum-ii-determina-pe-adolescenti-sa-se-sinucida-game-rules/>, accessed on 19.03.2017);

The stages of the rally were:

1. Identification with the target group; "Are your friends betraying you? Did your friend leave you? Do you often listen to sad music?"
2. The rule that instills fear and by which the curator exercises his authority: "There is no way back";
3. The imposition message: "You will die!"
4. Threat, coercion, emotional blackmail: "We have all the data about you!"

A simple "click on an attachment sent by e-mail can enable the entry into a computer or computer system, through which the hacker or the spy can take control of the private life, professional activity of the concerned person or the institution where he belongs. The same happens in the case of Internet games accessed by children. Cyber aggressors usually use sophisticated malware, an application from the category of viruses, Trojan horses, worms, etc., who steal data from the computer system. Once the computer is compromised, it sends information to the hacker every two seconds. It searches by a word for the information it needs and it enters the files. In the same way, they can also enter the smartphones from which they can obtain personal information, phone numbers, etc., as it happened recently to a teenage girl from Timisoara who accessed the Blue Whale game." (<http://www.evz.ro/legaturi-balena-albastra-spioni-cibernetici.html>, accessed on 19.03.2017).

"The game" was taken very seriously by the organizers. According to the testimony of a teenager, she was told that if she did not take "the final step", then she would be helped. The curators' lines were similar to: "If you don't do what is asked of you, then we will help you. We know your name, we know where you live". These were the messages of the bullies to the victims, thus they made the children to be stressed, to feel constrained, terrorized, they became more and more vulnerable to the individuals who bullied them. It is worth noting that, in fact, this "help" was actually intimidation and the threats were often direct; the children were afraid that their parents would be killed if they did not do what the Curator wanted.

4. The effects of the "Blue Whale Game" in Romania

In Romania, specialists asked for help from parents and teachers on TV channels and on the websites of each county police, with the purpose of making them aware. The latter were advised to "pay special attention to the way in which their children spend their time online", with the purpose of preventing the consequences of this game among teenagers. There was also "a prevention week" in which pupils, parents and teachers discussed about "safety in the online environment". The game started to be in the attention of the Control Commission of the Romanian Intelligence Service, recognized as the only institution capable of taking appropriate measures.

A series of investigations were also carried out at the national level, after the reported cases, especially by the teachers.

In Târgu Jiu, a pupil scratched her arms with a needle, after searching on the Internet for information about the "Blue Whale" game because of misunderstandings with her mother, who did not let her spend her free time as she wanted.

In Galati, 7 children with scratch marks on their forearms were discovered in class by a teacher. The pupils declared that "they were curious to experience great sensations". In Dâmbovița, 6 pupils, aged from 8 to 17, went through several stages of the virtual game. The pupils were advised by the school psychologist and by the police whereas the incident preceded several prevention activities carried out in the educational institutions.

Some teenagers "define their identity" by fearlessness, they want to stand out; therefore, it is important that the teachers point out "positive competition" among pupils. In Iași, 5 children from the 6th grade got to the hospital after participating together in a mission in the "Blue Whale" game.

Fragments of the pupils' dialogues were posted online as they followed the instructions of the game about which they said that they learned from the Internet:

"You kneel down like this, and the other person sits behind you.
-How many times do you do that?
-Many times, until you feel dizzy!
-Where did they find out about this?
-From the Internet!
-But is it a game or something?
-They said it's a game, I said it's dangerous, that they could end up in the hospital, but they said it's a game!
-What's the name of this game?
-The Blue Whale."

Source: <http://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/balena-albastra-cinci-copii-asfixiati-la-scoala>, accessed on 19.03.2017

In the center of Alba Iulia town, a blindfolded girl sitting on a bench sparked controversy among passers-by when she was photographed and later posted on the Internet. The teenager remained silent, showing no reaction to those around her and refraining from answering questions. Some suspected that she might have followed one of the game's instructions.

Specialists found that students who 'entered the game of death' were essentially attempting to 'prove their courage' or 'display bravery,' wanting to 'see how long they could endure the pain.' However, over time, they admitted that they began 'not to realize what they were doing.'

Psychologist Stelian Chivu, in a TV show, revealed that the game, spanning over 50 days, follows the programming of 'the subconscious mind' for 49 days, as outlined in the stages mentioned earlier in this article, with the last day being fatal. The specialist emphasized that even if the children who accessed the game didn't end up committing suicide, they would be affected in the long term, especially in terms of their receptivity.

Children with communication problems with their parents or close individuals were also at risk. Responsible adults must continually learn how to behave as parents, ensuring their own well-being and, above all, that of their child.

Symptoms of post-traumatic stress can significantly impact the overall development of pupils who fall victim to school bullying. They may struggle to form healthy relationships with their peers, exhibiting characteristics such as suicidal ideation, depression symptoms, low self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, anxiety, mental health issues, low popularity, difficult sociability, and eating disorders (Palaghia, 2022, 2023a).

In the cyber environment, individuals can shed their true identity and assume alternate roles. Here, marginalization, mobbing, and stalking take on a new dimension. In mere seconds, videos recorded with a mobile phone can be posted, depicting aggressions like the violation of a girl in the gym, an image of a schoolmate in the bathroom, a child being beaten in any space where they are drawn, and nude photos—sometimes manipulated—made available to hundreds of thousands of internet users. Victims feel they can no longer find a corner to be protected, carrying their cyberbullies 'in their pockets,' on their smartphones, where aggressors can directly intrude into the space where they find themselves at any moment, with consequences much more serious than traditional bullying.

The Blue Whale Challenge has heightened awareness about the potential dangers of online influence and underscored the importance of promoting online safety and mental health awareness, especially among young people. Child victims may face anxiety, depression, behavioural and emotional disorders, and even dramatic consequences such as the suppression of their own lives. In cases of cyberbullying, children may commit suicide out of fear, correlated with loneliness and the interpretation of personal experiences as failures, along with the lack of hope and helplessness. Ambivalence characterizes these individuals—a situation in which they 'want and, at the same time, do not wish for death.' In the case of 'death games,' victims experience 'self-suppression by coercion,' certainly due to vulnerabilities specific to their age. We emphasize the need to respect children's rights in the age of technology and to learn ways to develop (cyber)resilience (Palaghia, 2023b).

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