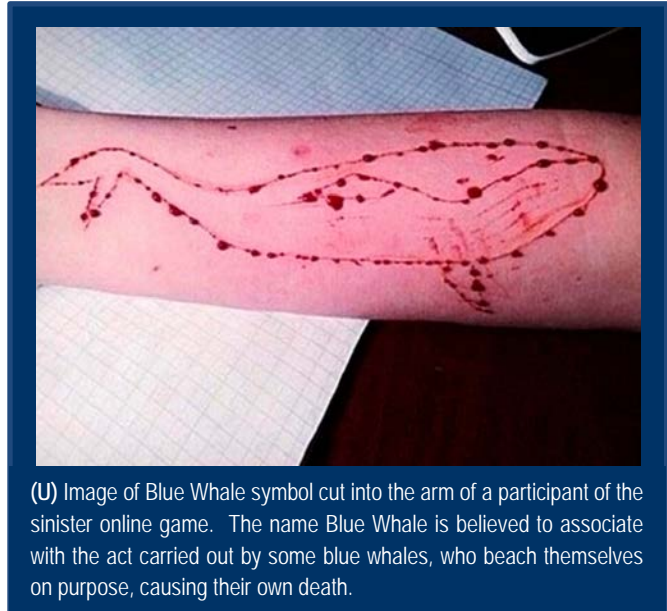


Date: 2 May 2017

Number: ICR-0064-17

(U) Subject: Blue Whale: An Online Suicide Game Potentially Linked to Over a Hundred Deaths

(U) Details: AFOSI is tracking an online phenomenon which could have implications for USAF/DOD dependents. Since Dec 2013 to May 2016, a Russian Investigative Committee has uncovered eight virtual groups promoting suicidal behavior. The groups target and encourage vulnerable teens online to commit suicide. In the game "Blue Whale," participants are assigned an administrator or curator. Over the course of 50 days that administrator/curator gives the participant daily challenges.¹ Initially, the tasks are simple, such as watching horror movies and waking up at unusual hours. However, the tasks slowly escalate and become increasingly dangerous when participants are instructed to search for high-rise buildings to jump from, distance themselves from friends and family, and commit acts of self-mutilation. For instance, participants are instructed to get a knife and cut the shape of a whale (seen as a symbol of a suicidal social media movement) on their wrist or leg.^{2,3,4} The participant is also instructed to document, and send proof that each challenge has been carried out. At the end of the 50 days, the participant is instructed to commit suicide. Participants were threatened by their administrator/curator if they refused to comply with requests.⁵



(U) The game has been identified operating under several names such as "A Quiet House/A Silent House," "A Sea/A Bunch of Whales," and "Wake Me Up 4.20 AM."⁶

(U) Law enforcement officials are investigating at least 130 suicides across Russia associated to this suicide challenge. While the game Blue Whale has not been definitively linked to any deaths, criminal charges of "incitement to suicide" have not been ruled out.⁷ Warnings to address the dangers of this game have already been issued in Russia, India, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States (US).

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(U) Risk Factors: Common factors of teen suicide include aggressive and/or disruptive behavior, substance abuse, depression, and firearms. Intense feelings can contribute to a teen's sense of helplessness and to an overall feeling their life is not worth living. Taking these feelings seriously is an important part of preventing teen suicide. Firearms are used in more than half of teen suicides, therefore it is important to realize that easy access to a firearm and ammunition can contribute to a teenage death by suicide.⁸

(U) Perspective: The Internet and other multimedia devices, such as cell phones, tablets, etc., have intensified the vulnerabilities facing teenagers. The USAF is concerned with the potential impact this online social media game may pose to teenage dependents. We strongly encourage all DoD members to monitor their teenagers' usage of social media and warn them of these dangers. It is also recommended for parents to actively discuss with their teens matters of feeling disconnected, disenfranchised, and having suicidal idealization. Caring for our nation's military children will help sustain our fighting force, and help strengthen the health, security, and safety of our nation's families and communities.

(U) It is important to know teens may avoid reporting their own concerns if they believe their internet access will be revoked. Therefore, parents can watch for signs that may indicate their child has been targeted. The following are some signs their teen may display if they have been targeted:

- They become very secretive, especially about what they are doing online
- They are switching screens on their device when approached
- They become withdrawn or angry after using the internet or sending text messages
- They have lots of new phone numbers or email addresses on their device⁹

(U) Additionally, help can be sought by contacting the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL) on 1-800-273-8255, or by going to their interactive website at <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>. The NSPL is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress and can be contacted 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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(U) AFOSI Products are available at www.afosi.af.smil.mil (SIPRNet) and www.afosi.ic.gov (JWICS).

(U) Product Number: 24907

(U) Please provide feedback, comments, or suggestions to: afosiicon-productionmanagement@us.af.mil

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