Courage and Cowardice:

A Discourse Analysis of Suicide and Self-Harm in Russia

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**Abstract**

Suicide and attempted suicide rates in Russia and former Soviet states are the highest of any region in the world, but interestingly, Russians have extremely low occurrences of (diagnosed) major depressive disorder. Research into suicide prevention and causes for suicide in Russia has only recently begun because data were obfuscated during the Soviet era, but recent findings indicate that Russian suicide mortality increased eleven-fold from 1870 to 2007. However, given that cases of mental illness like depression are so low, there is much debate in academia as to why suicide rates are so high. Existing scholarship is divided into three schools of thought: that suicide is linked to high rates of alcohol consumption (accidental poisoning), that the prevalence of suicide arose from Russian economic and social modernization (societal pressure), and that Russians are genetically predisposed to major depressive disorder or other suicide risk factors, but are often left undiagnosed (behavioral genetics). This paper investigates an alternative explanation for high rates of suicide: the socialization of suicide and how suicide is depicted or talked about in Russian media. Ample literature suggests that irresponsible depictions of suicide in media (both official news agencies and unofficial social forums) can lead to increases in suicidal ideation and execution. This research paper examines how suicide is depicted in Russian media by examining tweets about suicide and depression. Careful examination of depictions of suicide in Russian media have implications for the Kremlin’s suicide prevention policy and may open doors to new methods of prevention.

**I. Introduction**

Suicide prevention has long been ignored as an element of global health, and nowhere is it more important than the former Soviet bloc.[[1]](#footnote-1) Suicide statistics collected in former Soviet states were only recently made available to the rest of the world—after the dissolution of the Soviet Union—and the numbers paint a bleak picture of mental health in the region: Of the 800,000 annual deaths by suicide globally, approximately 50,000 occur in the Russian Federation alone, and suicide rates among teens in Russia are three times higher than the global average.[[2]](#footnote-2) But perhaps more hauntingly, for every person who dies by suicide, at least twenty people survive a suicide attempt.[[3]](#footnote-3) Many scholars have attempted to explain comparatively high Slavic suicide rates through three distinct frameworks: that suicide is linked to high rates of alcohol consumption, that the prevalence of suicide arose from Russian economic and social modernization, or that Russians are typically left undiagnosed and untreated when confronted with depressive disorder or other suicide risk factors. However, one large body of literature that is noticeably absent from discussions of suicide in post-Soviet states is a discussion on the socialization of suicide. To investigate an alternative explanation for high rates of suicide, this paper asks the question:

*How do social media discourses influence Russian perceptions of mental health and suicide?*

 I posit that the unhealthy socialization of suicide and how suicide is depicted or talked about in Russian social media may explain high rates of suicide in Russia and the former Soviet bloc. Ample literature suggests that irresponsible depictions of suicide in media (both official news agencies and unofficial social forums) can lead to increases in suicidal ideation and execution.[[4]](#footnote-4) This research paper assesses how suicide is depicted in Russian media by examining tweets written in Russian about suicide and depression.

 After the literature review, I discuss methodological choices made in carrying out this interpretive research project. I analyzed forty tweets written in Russian that make an argument, implicitly or explicitly, about the act or victim(s) of suicide (as opposed to just reporting the act of suicide). Schwartz-Shea and Yanow underscore the importance of interpretive “mapping” for exposure and intertextuality in interpretive research, so I approached tweets with no expectations and simply collected the ones I thought were most interesting or made most prescient arguments (as opposed to categorizing tweets in a top-down approach).[[5]](#footnote-5) To draw conclusions from the tweets, I used NVivo to code tweets according to four categories I noticed emerge naturally among the collected tweets.

Following the discussion of methodology, this paper analyzes trends and cross-tabulation of categories among the tweets. I conclude that many mental health stigmas prevalent in Russian social media are similar to those we find in the West—that victims are “selfish,” “crazy,” or “took the easy way out”—yet there is another discourse present that is unlike what Westerners typically encounter: Suicide is sometimes portrayed as “success,” a display of strength of the victim’s resolve in a perverse sort of competition. I also argue that this depiction of suicide is more dangerous than typical tropes. Language used when discussing suicide is an often-overlooked but potentially significant suicide risk factor, and there are far-reaching implications for the Kremlin’s suicide prevention policy. The conclusion of this paper discusses potential methods and strategies for suicide prevention and protection that former Soviet states may adopt.

**II. Literature Review**

Russian suicide rates have been the subject of intense research over the past decade. Three schools of thought molded the creation of my research question. The first notion of “accidental poisoning” I deemed to be unrelated to the essence of the research puzzle. I believe that accidental alcohol poisoning is a separate and distinct issue from intentional suicide, but the largest body literature about suicide in post-Soviet states discusses alcohol consumption, so I felt it important to include. I did also learn culturally significant lessons from a handful of these scholars. The second prevalent topic area views suicide as a byproduct of societal and economic pressures germinating from the collapse of the Soviet Union; this literature relates most directly to the discourse of “suicide as a problem-solving method” discussed later in this paper. Finally, the most applicable school of thought is that of inadequate treatment—the idea that, due to stigma, Russians often do not seek mental treatment even in the face of suicide risk factors. This belief that Russians are too embarrassed to seek treatment is something I thought merited deeper exploration, and this paper posits that social media discourses play a large part in shaping and perpetuating stigma that precludes treatment.

One point of clarification should be made: Literature on the subject of suicide in post-Soviet societies often emphasizes ethnic or cultural factors. Yet this research paper relies on analyzing tweets written in the Russian language; there is no way to determine whether they originated from ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians, or even Indonesians or Peruvians that decided to write tweets in Russian. I believe that this distinction is irrelevant, and this paper does not differentiate between Russians and Russian speakers. To me, Russian language and culture are co-constitutive in nature. In accordance with the Whorfian hypothesis, the bluntness of the Russian language leads to a certain frame of mind that is unique from that of the West.[[6]](#footnote-6) To differentiate between Russians and Russian speakers is not only impossible, but futile for the purpose of this analysis. Moreover, if they dedicated so many hours to studying the language, most foreign speakers of Russian probably have a firm grasp on Slavic culture, customs, and mindset, and this mentality would probably manifest in tweets written in Russian, rendering the distinction moot.

*I. Alcohol Consumption*

Alcohol is a significant cultural product in Russia and former Soviet states, and most literature about suicide in the region heavily emphasizes the importance of alcohol. There are two ways in which alcohol may be involved in suicide. The first and most obvious link is accidental, self-inflicted death by alcohol poisoning. By some estimates 35 percent of premature male deaths (defined as death under the age of fifty-five) in Russia are caused by excessive alcohol consumption.[[7]](#footnote-7) Seventy-five percent of alcohol consumed in Russia is vodka, which is typically 40 percent alcohol-by-volume—a potent spirit capable of causing critical liver damage very quickly.[[8]](#footnote-8) In the context of this paper’s analysis, accidental alcohol poisoning is unrelated to the broader problem of intentional self-harm, which is why alcohol consumption in Russia is not a primary focus of this research project. There is, however, important cultural context to be gleaned from literature about alcohol consumption. Russians’ proclivity for binge-drinking falls in line with the competitive element of Russian culture. Often groups of young men will compete to outpace each other’s drinking. This competitiveness plays a crucial part in the findings presented later in this paper.

Second and more subtle is the concept that people under the influence of alcohol are more likely to take drastic, violent action in response to an emotional outburst. Razvodovsky chronicles how people that are drunk are more likely to feel intense grief, despair, guilt, anger, or remorse as a result of the alcohol, thereby eliciting an emotional state conducive to suicide.[[9]](#footnote-9) Suicide in general demands making an incredibly difficult decision; an extraordinarily amplified emotional state that is typically only experienced for a matter of minutes is almost always a requisite for intentional suicide. Alcohol may induce an emotive state more easily and for a longer duration of time, making suicide more likely. Moreover, Pridemore argues that alcohol consumption is strongly positively associated with violence, finding that a 1 percent increase in regional alcohol consumption precipitates a 0.25 percent increase in homicide and suicide in the region.[[10]](#footnote-10) The volatile emotional period caused by drunkenness is directly related to the intentional suicide this paper focuses on. Ultimately, though, none of the tweets analyzed in this paper mention alcohol—not out of deliberate choice, but because alcohol was for some reason a non-issue in the discourses selected. It is unclear to what extent alcohol may influence social media discourses about suicide. There is more research to be done on this topic, and particularly whether the glorification of alcohol in Russian culture manifests in the glorification of violence.

*II. Socioeconomic Pressure*

The second major theory that explains suicide in Russia is a rather crude one: People that lead unhappy or problem-riddled lives are more likely to die by suicide. Scholars argue that, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian families entered a period of intense struggle. Services that were previously provided by the state were no longer free, and Russians fell into social and economic hardship as a result. To put it plainly, post-Soviet states are generally not great places to live in the twenty-first century, and that may explain why suicide rates are so high in the region. Chernetsky, for example, explores how globalization is profoundly transforming the Russian economy and widening income inequality in the former Soviet bloc.[[11]](#footnote-11) Moreover, the Happy Planet Index ranks the Russian Federation 116th out of 140 countries, and GDP is less than $14,000 per capita—much lower than most OECD member states.[[12]](#footnote-12) These real problems plaguing Russia do not present easy solutions, and many Russians may find themselves questioning the meaning of life.

Russians are also subjectively less happy than most denizens of the world.[[13]](#footnote-13) Globalization prompted the crosspollination of people and ideas to and from countries formerly obscured by an iron curtain. Scholars that subscribe to the “socioeconomic pressure” theory contend that many Russians became disillusioned after discovering they suffered from comparatively poor economic and social conditions. Others felt shame in the “formlessness” that suddenly filled the gulf of their former identities.[[14]](#footnote-14) As a result, the number of professionals seeking to leave Russia now exceeds 50 percent, and this exodus of would-be friends and relatives has depleted Russians’ emotional support networks.[[15]](#footnote-15) Abbott and Sapsford contend that, after experiencing the “triple shock”—economic, political, and social—Russians were left without adequate coping mechanisms, leading to a rise in suicide rates.[[16]](#footnote-16) Psychiatrists agree that effective problem-solving deteriorates in those who experience suicidal ideation or suicide, causing people to become trapped in cycles of depression.[[17]](#footnote-17)

*III. Inadequate Care*

 The last and most salient group of scholarship concerns itself with inadequate treatment for people suffering from mental illness and suicide risk factors. The problem of inadequate treatment exists on both the supply and demand side of the health care equation. In terms of supply, the inadequate availability of mental health treatment in Russia is in part due to the socioeconomic pressure discussed in the previous section; Shek, Lumme-Sandt, and Pietila contend that the collapse of the Soviet Union caused a drastic decrease in the availability of healthcare, including for mental illnesses like depression and other suicide risk factors.[[18]](#footnote-18) In some rural areas of Russia, few doctors are available, let alone psychiatrists. Many scholars argue that it is the state’s fault that so many people die by suicide, and that the state is not doing enough to prevent suicide.

In terms of demand, widespread stigma deters people from seeking treatment for mental health problems. In post-Soviet societies, “mental illness is widely equated with dangerousness,” and victims of mental illness have “few—if any—rights.”[[19]](#footnote-19) In contrast to community-based mental health services available in other developed countries, asylums in Russia are oppressive and frequently the sites of human rights abuses.[[20]](#footnote-20) At the utterance of the word “suicidal,” many Russians’ minds drift to the Soviet politicization of psychiatry, including involuntary asylum commitments ranging from 2.5 to 18 years.[[21]](#footnote-21) Furthermore, Slavic culture (particularly among men) places a premium on strength and resilience. To admit “weakness” by seeking help or treatment represents a slight to one’s esteem. Even physical injuries in Russia often go untreated for this reason; it takes a lot of coaxing from babushka for boys to seek help.[[22]](#footnote-22)

 Finally, stigma against mental illness can spread more easily and widely now more than ever. The Internet allows Russian speakers to spread messages more easily because of increased exposure, and because emotive messages are more likely to go viral.[[23]](#footnote-23) Carr contends that ideas can more easily penetrate borders as well.[[24]](#footnote-24) The anonymity afforded to Twitter users may also cause the content of tweets to be more dramatic or sensationalized; “anonymity and mobility afforded by the Internet has made harassment and expressions of hate effortless.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

*IV. Key Takeaways*

 Each area of scholarship addressed above has influenced decisions made in this research project design. Understanding the important role of alcohol consumption provides context for the heightened, highly-emotive state in which suicide occurs in Russia. The complete absence of mentions of alcohol in Russian tweets about suicide begs the question as to why. Literature about socioeconomic pressure in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse provided two-prong support for this research project: First, socioeconomic scholars establish context for Russian tweets that depict suicide as a problem-solving method or talk about cowardice and escapism. Second, economic shortcomings are a precursor to inadequate mental health treatment. This third school of thought highlights the causes and implications of inadequate treatment in terms of both supply and demand. The scholarship about mental health stigma represents the framework upon which this study was conducted.

**III. Methods and Methodology**

The specific discourses I analyzed include narratives written in Russian on social media that stigmatize the act or victim(s) of suicide. When collecting data, I translated each tweet through both Google and Bing. Then, I compared the translations to one another and used my own knowledge of the Russian language to clarify discrepancies between translations, as well as to recognize the significance of deixes and cultural markers or slang words. When initially collecting tweets, there was no preconceived or premeditated set of categories of words to search; instead I began the search with neutral, sanitary terms related to the act of suicide or death (самоубийство, суициднуться, and смерть). After collecting the first twenty or so tweets in this manner, distinct patterns began to emerge, and I developed a list of search terms and hashtags of commonly found “charged” phrases, which were sorted into a table (figure 1). This strategy of bottom-up discourse processing is based on that of other interpretive scholars and helps to ensure “interpretive mapping” described by Schwartz-Shae and Yanow.[[26]](#footnote-26)

*Figure 1*

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| **Neutral terms related to the act of suicide** | **Normative assessments of the victim’s motivation** | **Slander or insults relating to the victim** | **Terms relating to the “blue whale group”** |
| Самоубийство (Suicide) | Эгоистичный/ая(Selfish) | Гей(Gay) | Синийкит(Blue Whale) |
| Суициднуться(Suicide) | Легко(Easy) | Голубой/ая(Homosexual, Gay) | Тихийдом(Quiet House) |
| Соверши(Perform, Commit) | Аферисты(Swindlers) | Аферисты(Swindlers) | Морекитов(Sea Creatures) |
| Смерть(Death) | Происшествия(Accident) | Трусливый/ая(Coward) | Разбудименяв(Wake Me Up) |
| Пропал(Disappeared, Vanished) | Скучно(Bored) | Псих(Crazy) | Ф57 or Ф58(Day 57, Day 58) |

To draw conclusions, I coded tweets using NVivo according to three distinct patterns that took shape during the research process. The first pattern I analyzed was whether tweets were related to a social media trend known as the “blue whale game,” which is explained further in the results section. The second pattern was based on my own subjective analysis of the tweet’s message about the victim—whether it conveyed solidarity or remorse for the victim, slandered the victim (especially by calling them cowardly or selfish), or commented on the victim’s sexuality. Finally, I assessed the tweet’s message about the victim’s motivation—boredom, hardship, pain and suffering, competition, or completing a “game.” The analysis presented in this paper is based on the frequency at which those patterns occurred as well as the cross-tabulation of the three patterns within tweets.

Schwartz-Shea and Yanow warn that “Commonly accepted positivist standards for assessing research”—specifically validity, reliability, replicability, objectivity, and falsifiability—are inappropriate criteria for measuring the trustworthiness of an interpretive research project.[[27]](#footnote-27) They explain that, in neopositivist social science research, larger samples are better because they are more representative of the population.[[28]](#footnote-28) Being predicated on an interpretive research design, however, this paper does not concern itself with the “representativeness” of the tweets selected. This paper does not contend that the forty tweets analyzed are indicative of broader Russian stigmas about suicide in real life, but these are real and significant trends that exist at the very least on Twitter. Rather than prioritize representativeness, I have followed the five steps recommended by Schwartz-Shea and Yanow to verify trustworthiness in this interpretive research design:[[29]](#footnote-29)

1. To ensure *bottom-up*, *in situ concept development*, I have made sure to extensively scour primary source documents to identify appropriate, existing discourses that are naturally present in Russian media and tweets (as opposed to assuming certain discourses exist, and then finding primary sources to support that analysis).
2. I have maintained *constitutive understandings of causality* by approaching my topic from a non-linear perspective, unlike much of the existing literature which tries to identify specific causes for perceived “effects” on Russian rates of suicide.
3. *Reflexivity* and *the relevance of my identity as a researcher* is not forgotten in this research design; this research is practical and applicable, but I acknowledge I am a Western observer of a foreign culture and I make frequent comparisons in my analysis between my observations of Western and Russian discourses.
4. I am keeping in mind *the need for improvisation in the field* by ensuring that I am open to searching new hashtags and using different keywords as I discover them during analysis and as they emerge in real-time (because the social construction of “suicide” in Russia is fluctuating).
5. The data I am collecting will be *co-generated in field relationships* because many tweets collected are responses to one another.

Finally, I have done my best to address “reflexivity,” the “systematic consideration of the researcher’s characteristics”—both demographic and disciplinary.[[30]](#footnote-30) My family has a history of mental illness and I know several loved ones and friends who have attempted and completed suicide. I recognize that my implicit bias has the potential to skew this research, and I have taken appropriate steps to ensure transparency in this project.[[31]](#footnote-31) My coding and analysis of tweets in NVivo is a prime location where my “personal characteristics [as a researcher] may [affect] particular interactions.”[[32]](#footnote-32) It is a difficult balancing act to objectively assess stigma about a topic one cares so much about, but I am hoping that by being cognizant of my implicit bias and being transparent about my background, I can mitigate some of this effect.

**IV. Results and Analysis**

My findings include a discussion of how suicide and self-harm are characterized in the Russian tweets collected. I first discuss the motif of suicide as a problem-solving method, followed by suicide as a cowardly-or-courageous act, before finally addressing disparaging remarks made about victims of suicide and mental illness in general. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow express how important it is to maximize exposure while considering intertextuality in interpretive research, and as such, I have gone out of my way to diversify the kinds of Twitter accounts I am consulting.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Most “charged” terms from figure 1 appeared in the tweets I analyzed, especially normative assessments of victims’ motivations for suicide. The first major finding of this paper is that Russian stigmas about suicide are very similar to those we find in the West—that victims are “selfish,” “crazy,” or “took the easy way out.”[[34]](#footnote-34) Thirty-five percent (fourteen) of the tweets I analyzed characterized suicide as a method of “solving problems.” Among those sympathetic to victims of suicide, a common sentiment was that “There are a lot of situations where suicide is generally the only way to solve problems.”[[35]](#footnote-35) This corroborates prior field research done by the World Health Organization, which argued in 2016 that one of the largest barriers to suicide prevention in the Russian Federation is obstructionist attitudes and beliefs, including a focus on a “narrow range of mental disorders” and “therapeutic pessimism” concerning recovery from severe mental illness and hardship.[[36]](#footnote-36) Of the tweets that characterized suicide as a problem-solving method, fifty-seven percent (eight) perpetuated the stigma that victims of suicide are “cowardly” (трусливый) or “selfish” (эгоистичный) for taking the “easy (легко) way out.” Such rhetoric paints suicide or self-harm as an easy or honorless method of death.

Perhaps more interestingly, however, is that many tweets characterized victims of suicide as being “courageous” (смелостий/ая)—a notion that is generally absent from Western discussions of suicide and self-harm. Seventy-one percent of tweets that characterized suicide as a problem-solving method argued that the act of suicide demands “considerable courage.”[[37]](#footnote-37) The explanation for this may reside in the development of Russian culture, which places a premium on hard work and strength. The Russian spirit is a competitive one, and committing the ultimate act of self-harm is in some cases seen as impressive. There is historical precedent for this depiction. *Anna Karenina*, Leo Tolstoy’s most famous novel and perhaps the most well-recognized and culturally significant novel in Russia, concludes with a heroic and artistic depiction of Karenina’s suicide by train.[[38]](#footnote-38) Even some of the tweets analyzed in this study specifically pointed to suicide as a motif of courage in Russian novels, among other cultural products.[[39]](#footnote-39) Another tweet hailed suicide as a method of achieving fame and notoriety, pointing to how the famous singer Chuck Berry was propelled to popularity post-mortem—a notion which another user labeled as “ostentatious suicide.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

“Удивительно, как смерть влияет на известность человека. #ЧакБерри Люди, которые всегда хотели прославиться возьмите на заметку!😉#синий\_кит.”

*“It's amazing how death affects human popularity. #ChuckBerry People who always wanted to become famous, take note! 😉 #bluewhale.”*

The idea of suicide-as-success is reinforced implicitly and explicitly in Russian media. Implicitly, official Russian news outlets often make a mistake that is still common in the West by characterizing suicides as “successful” or “unsuccessful.”[[41]](#footnote-41) This language is particularly important because the Russian word for “unsuccessful”—*неудавшееся*—is the same word for “failed,” and has a negative connotation of incompletion or dissatisfaction. The same problematic language is frequently seen in Western media, and health organizations in the United States and international bodies like the WHO and United Nations have repeatedly urged media outlets to avoid this language.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Explicitly, suicide has developed into a literal competition among Russian youth. In the Russian corner of the Internet, a troubling trend has appeared known as the “blue whale group,” a social media “game” where young Russians have taken to committing themselves to do anything and everything an anonymous person on Twitter dictates to them for a period of sixty days. At the end of sixty days, the idea is that the final task given to the person is to commit suicide, with incremental steps of self-harm in between.[[43]](#footnote-43) Moreover, the blue whale trend, which originated in Russia, has been spreading due to the globalization of media outlets. Twenty percent (eight) of the tweets I analyzed mentioned the blue whale phenomenon or used the hashtag *#синийкит*, and in many tweets, *#синийкит* was used synonymously with the Russian word for “suicide.” But the blue whale game is not the only context in which suicide is labeled as competitive, but it is one of the most interesting ones, as it depicts the ultimate act of self-harm as enjoyable, fun, and competitive—themes that are foreign to Western conceptions of suicide. Ultimately, the blue whale game only accounted for about forty percent of mentions of competition, which poses a problem for Russian suicide prevention efforts. One tweet heralded that “If suicide were a sport, it would justify all the money and honors that athletes receive.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Because language that depicts suicide as a mark of courage or martyrdom, first, is so common, and second, effectively harnesses competitive Russian spirit, socialization may explain why suicide rates are so high in Russia and former soviet states.

Yet another alarming trend is that many tweets disparaged victims of suicide as being “whiny,” “complaining,” “crazy,” “idiots,” or killing themselves due to “some type of garbage” that cannot be prevented.[[45]](#footnote-45) This feeling of hopelessness paired with stigmatization of mental illness broadly precludes effective government programs designed to prevent suicide. The two national hotlines in Russia largely go unused and are generally not well-publicized.[[46]](#footnote-46) The World Health Organization’s mhGAP report recommends that governments take a strong roll in implementing national policies to dispel stigma against mental illness and to adopt active suicide prevention policies in order to meet the target goal of ten percent reductions in suicide globally by 2020.[[47]](#footnote-47) Unfortunately, the Kremlin does not appear to be taking an active enough stance and stigma runs rampant in the tweets collected for this study. Many tweets also specifically disparaged LGBT+ people, arguing that they would be “better off” dying by suicide.[[48]](#footnote-48)

There may yet be problems with the research project conducted, though I have done my best to acknowledge issues of reflexivity and intertextuality. Forty tweets may seem like too small of a small sample size to make credible claims, but due to the sensitive nature of the subject of suicide, few quality tweets exist in English or in Russian that make arguments about the victims or act of suicide. Further research on this topic ought to investigate specifically how state-sponsored news outlets report on stories of suicide as well as how suicide is discussed among Russian speakers outside of the Twittersphere. Questions also linger over the specific role of LGBT+ voices in the conversation, and my own research project has had some flaws. It is difficult to determine whether tweets written in Russian actually originated in Russia or were written by Russians, but I would argue that this distinction does not matter insofar as the tweets contribute to discourses about suicide that Russians are having online. The implications of this study are far-reaching; if the Kremlin truly wants to prevent suicide and achieve a ten percent reduction in deaths by the year 2020, it must pursue a more active role to curb the stigma that runs rampant online.

**V. Conclusion**

Russian stigmas about mental illness and suicide are for the most part similar to those found in the West—shaming victims for “cowardice”—but there is also a unique message unlike anything found in Western social media: the notion of suicide as “success” in a sort of perverse competition. Russian admiration for the “courage” demanded by suicide is more dangerous than traditional Western stigmas about mental health, because while Western stigmas tend to shame victims of suicide, the Russian idea of suicide-as-success reinforces self-harm as a valid problem-solving method by praising victims of suicide for their resolve and dedication. This praise may precipitate tangible increased numbers of victims and survivors of suicide.

Talk of suicide on social media is a lose-lose-lose situation. When those still alive see the dead being disparaged and (especially in the case of men) essentially emasculated for their “weakness,” they are less likely to seek help for fear of the same reputation. Conversely, when the dead are praised for their inner strength and ability to inflict self-harm, those still alive are more likely to consider suicide as a legitimate problem-solving method. When nothing at all is said of the victims of suicide, people who experience suicidal ideation do not know where to turn.

The best option, therefore, is to try to replace unhealthy, stigmatizing discourses with healthier, productive ones. The Russian Federation and other post-Soviet societies should increase investment in community-based mental health education and destigmatization programs to curb the spread of problematic discourses. Similar programs have proved successful at colleges in the United States and churches in the United Kingdom. Moreover, the Kremlin should inhibit access to tools used to commit suicide and products associated with risk of suicide. This too has a track record of success: After stricter alcohol consumption policy was implemented in Russia in 2006, suicide rates dropped by 9 percent.[[49]](#footnote-49)

The World Health Organization warned in 2016 of “therapeutic pessimism concerning the possibility of recovery from severe and enduring mental illness,” explaining that this pessimism is associated with many Russians’ belief in the necessity for “long-term protective institutional care for most patients”—the same (often involuntary) long-term care that dissuades people from seeking treatment in the first place.[[50]](#footnote-50)

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Appendix A

Tweet 01 <https://twitter.com/melenkionline/status/847742709028737024>

* Неудавшееся самоубийство 29-летней девушки в муромском Панфилово.
* The failed suicide of a 29-year-old girl in Murom Panfilovo.

Tweet 02 <https://twitter.com/suranov69/status/847740312843730944>

* Есть куча ситуаций, когда самоубийство - вообще единственный способ разрешения проблем, не лучший, конечно, но порой выбора нет.
* There are a lot of situations where suicide is generally the only way to solve problems, not the best, of course, but sometimes there is no choice.

Tweet 03 <https://twitter.com/Basil_Italy/status/847543077002768384>

* Виды самоубийства: 1. показное самоубийство 2. аффектогенное самоубийство 3. истинный суицид 4. рациональный суицид.
* Types of suicide: 1. Ostentatious suicide 2. affectogenic suicide 3. true suicide 4. rational suicide.

Tweet 04 <https://twitter.com/ushadys_/status/847529785798557696>

* французские романы: самоубийство из-за любви русские романы: самоубийство, потому что тебе не слабо.
* French novels: suicide because of love Russian novels: suicide, because you are not weak.

Tweet 05 <https://twitter.com/True_Faust/status/844096019461758976>

* Если бы самоубийство было спортом, это бы оправдало все деньги и почести, которые получают спортсмены.
* If suicide were a sport, it would justify all the money and honors that athletes receive.

Tweet 06 <https://twitter.com/KalinkaAnya/status/847755413537861632>

* Как за неделю написать 6 сочинений на 200 слов и прочитать 6 книг и не суициднуться?
* How in a week to write 6 essays for 200 words and read 6 books and not suicide?

Tweet 07 <https://twitter.com/Leonialler/status/843895351895609344>

* чем чаще показывают программы про подростков, суициднувшихся из-за какой-то херни, тем чаще родители спрашивают все ли у меня в порядке.
* The more often they show programs about adolescents suicidal due to some kind of garbage, the more often parents ask if I'm all right.

Tweet 08 <https://twitter.com/dednevaaa/status/843510359927504896>

* мама не хотела меня отпускать гулять из-за этого синего кита типо може я тоже хочу суициднуться аааа тяжелооо.
* Mom did not want to let me go for a walk because of this blue whale because she thinks I also want to commit suicide aaaah heavy handed.

Tweet 09 <https://twitter.com/stmrkk/status/843443734201143296>

* когда блять люди поймут что тот кто рил хочет суициднуться не станет рассказывать об этом а просто вскроется нахуййййй.
* When will people fucking understand that the people who really want suicide will not talk about it and just fucking open up.

Tweet 10 <https://twitter.com/JustSmileAnita/status/842488527564783616>

* Есть некоторые твиттерские, которые сколько я их вижу время от времени в ленте они всё время ноют, жалуются и хотят суициднуться.
* There are some tweets that I see from time to time in my feed they are all the time whining, complaining and want to suicide.

Tweet 11 <https://twitter.com/SergeNeron/status/799654785687449600>

* предложение провести гей-парад там, где народ не готов ещё принять его ценности - это заявка на самоубийство его участников.
* The proposal to hold a gay parade where people are not yet ready to accept its values ​​is just asking for the suicide of its participants.

Tweet 12 <https://twitter.com/DMarozis/status/675191118498254848>

* Самоубийство-трусливый поступок, для совершения которого нужна огромная смелость.
* Suicide is a cowardly deed, for the fulfillment of which one needs great courage.

Tweet 13 <https://twitter.com/_HARRY__LOUIS__/status/617769849868185600>

* самоубийство-это не выход. Только трусливый человек убье себя потому что побоится решить проблему.
* Suicide is not an option. Only a cowardly man kills himself because he is afraid to solve the problem.

Tweet 14 <https://twitter.com/protuberanzen/status/264967682510692352>

* Я согласна с идеей о том, что самоубийство - не трусливый поступок. Самоубийство - это поступок беспросветных идиотов.
* I agree with the idea that suicide is not a cowardly act. Suicide is the act of hopeless idiots.

Tweet 15 <https://twitter.com/edem_saga/status/294905170469478400>

* тому кто говорит,что убить себя это подлый трусливый поступок-Трусость не имеет с этим ничего общего самоубийство требует немалого мужества
* The one who says that killing himself is a cowardly act of cowards-Cowardice has nothing to do with this suicide requires considerable courage.

Tweet 16 <https://twitter.com/fedtheredthread/status/795705689511522304>

* Но, безусловно, самоубийство есть, на мой взгляд, самый глупый и эгоистичный поступок. Хотя, если ты не несешь никому пользу своей жизнью...
* But, of course, suicide is, in my opinion, the most stupid and selfish act. Although, if you do not carry anybody the benefit of your life...

Tweet 17 <https://twitter.com/DeanSobini/status/843732448420749312>

* Удивительно, как смерть влияет на известность человека. #ЧакБерри Люди, которые всегда хотели прославиться возьмите на заметку!😉#синий\_кит.
* It's amazing how death affects human popularity. #ChuckBerry People who always wanted to become famous, take note! 😉 #bluewhale.

Tweet 18 <https://twitter.com/BenRoyale2/status/840041327123415041>

* Смерть приходит, когда пришло время...Цените свою жизнь, пока вы её не потеряли. Синий кит- это не выход!
* Death comes when the time has come ... Appreciate your life until you lose it. Blue whale is not an option!

Tweet 19 <https://twitter.com/AnhelinkaZet/status/834141722556899328>

* Я думаю многие наслышаны о игре на смерть Синий кит! Не нужно портить свою жизнь, чтобы поиграть в игру на смерть! Не думай что ты лишний!
* I think many have heard of the game of death Blue whale! Do not spoil your life to play the game to death! Do not think that you're superfluous!

Tweet 20 <https://twitter.com/HazzaPuf/status/843913120452100096>

* Тупо когда человек совершает самоубийство а все вокруг начинают говорить типа У НЕГО ВСЕ БЫЛО ХОРОШО ОН ВЕЛ СЕБЯ КАК ОБЫЧНО РАДОВАЛСЯ ЖИЗНИ.
* It's stupid when a person commits suicide and everyone around starts to say like HE WAS WELL BEHAVED AS USUAL AND WELL LIKED.
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