This critical discourse analysis examines language and deixes used when tweeting about suicide. I selected 40 tweets written in Russian that made an argument, implicitly or explicitly, about the act or victims of suicide. Each tweet was translated via Google and Bing; nuances in translation were clarified with my own knowledge of Russian. Tweets were categorized manually based on common patterns across tweets.

RESEARCH QUESTION

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

METHODOLOGY

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OTHER LITERATURE

1. Accidental Poisoning: high levels of alcohol consumption; approximately 30 percent of deaths by suicide in Russia occur via alcohol.
2. Societal Pressure: services that were once provided by the state are no longer free, causing money problems and family issues.
3. Behavioral Genetics: Russians are genetically predisposed to major depressive disorder or other suicide risk factors but are not diagnosed due to stigma and legal barriers.

FINDINGS

35% of tweets characterized suicide as a problem-solving method
57% of tweets characterized victims as “cowardly” and/or “selfish”
71% of tweets argued that suicide demands “considerable courage”
20% of tweets mentioned the “blue whale” social media “game”

“Suicide as Success”

Russian stigmas about suicide are similar to those we find in the West—that victims are “selfish,” “crazy,” or “took the easy way out.” Yet there are also different discourses at play, which simultaneously paint suicide as “success” in a sort of perverse competition.

WHO: unhealthy attitudes are the largest barrier to suicide prevention in Russia.

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IMPLICATIONS

Competitive Culture
Post-Cold War Shock
Social Media