

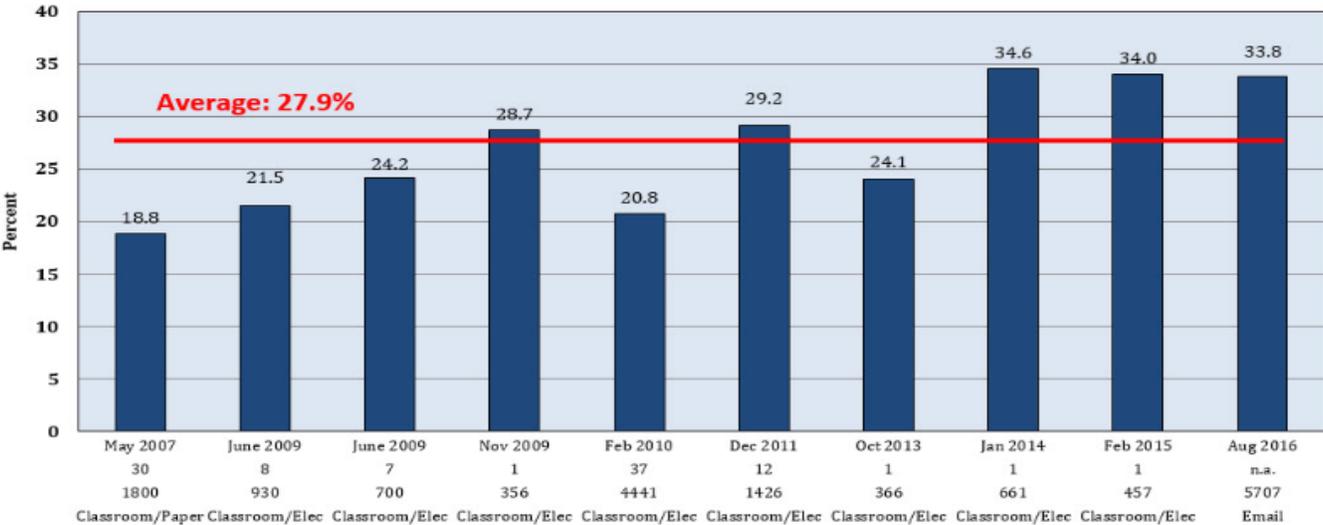
BULLYING, CYBERBULLYING, CHILD ABUSE, HUMAN TRAFFICKING



<https://cyberbullying.org/>



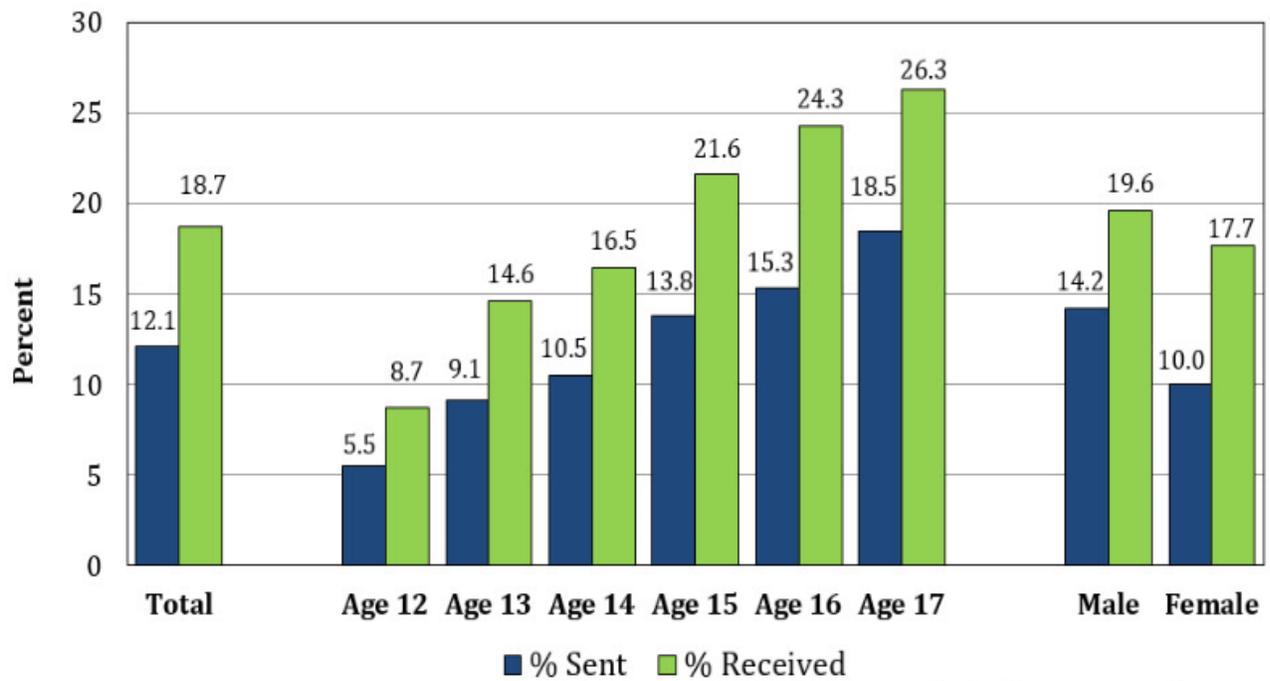
Lifetime Cyberbullying Victimization Rates Ten Different Studies 2007-2016



Justin W. Patchin and Sameer Hinduja
Cyberbullying Research Center
www.cyberbullying.org

Sexting among Middle and High School Students

(national U.S. sample of 5,539 12-17 year-olds)

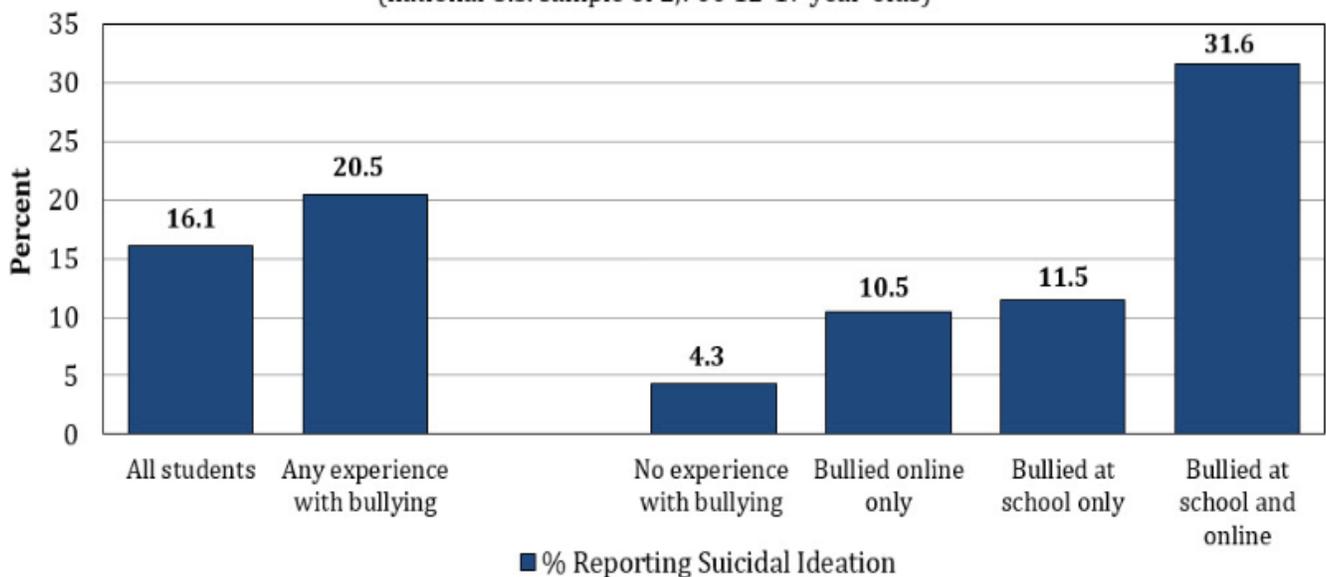


Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin (2016)

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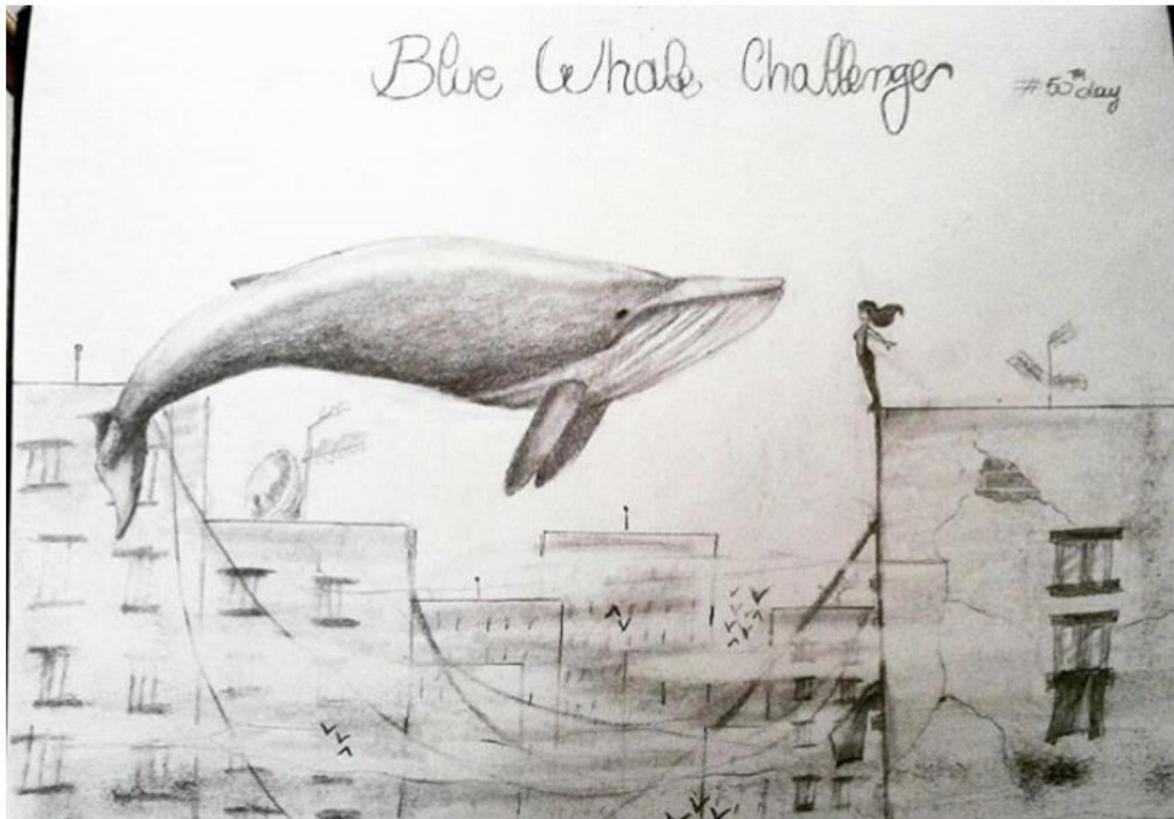
Bullying and Suicide among Middle and High School Students

(national U.S. sample of 2,700 12-17 year-olds)



Sameer Hinduja and Justin W. Patchin (2016)

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What is the Blue Whale Challenge?

The challenge originated in Russia and targets children between 10 and 14 years of age, reported Leonid Bershidsky for Bloomberg. It spread to several countries through social media in 2016 when a journalist with Russian publication Novaya Gazeta investigated her daughter's online activity after she committed suicide. What she uncovered was a culture of online "death groups" on a Russian social network called VKokakte where the administrator or curator would assign tasks to a vulnerable teen.

The tasks ranged from telling the participating teen to self-harm, send photos of the same to the curator, climb a crane or ledge, not speak to anyone all day, to wake up in the wee hours of the morning to watch scary videos and listen to music the curator sends, speak to other 'whales' (participants) and finally, commit suicide by jumping off a high building.

This year, there have been several reports of teen suicides. The tasks also involve social media platforms like Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook where at some point in these 50 tasks, the teen has to post photos of the self-harm (often, a blue whale drawn on a body part with a blade) and use dedicated hashtags.

If, at some point, the child gets cold feet or tries to back out of the challenge, the curators reportedly threaten them, often saying that their parents will be harmed.

Why would a child voluntarily participate in the challenge?

The tasks in the challenge are clearly oriented towards isolating the child and pushing her/him to self-harm. A question which would come to mind is – why would a person voluntarily take orders from a virtual entity which would cause her/him pain?

The answer lies in problems which many teenagers across the world face on a daily basis – peer pressure, depression and the need for validation.

Teens who are likely to fall prey to challenges such as these are already going through depression, anxiety or some form of depressive episodes. “A person in sound mental health will not resort to self-harm or seeking validation online.”

A plethora of physical as well as psychological changes in teenagers makes them a vulnerable demographic. Justin Patchin, co-director of the Wisconsin-based Cyberbullying Research Center, said something similar about teens. “The last thing a teen wants is to be excluded.” Adolescent psychologist Barbara Greenberg said that the game is deceptive because it leads depressed kids to believe that they are playing a game, but they are, in fact, dealing with mental health issues.

Once the teen is inducted into a challenge such as this, she/he will meet more like-minded people, which solidifies their sense of belonging. “As they complete each task, it gets associated to their sense of achievement and self-worth. It also induces another form of peer pressure – that which arises from emotional manipulation by the curator and the online community, preventing the teen from seeking help.”

She also points out that the person who devised this challenge also probably had psychopathic or sociopathic tendencies, and can easily relate to the children who come in contact with him. Incidentally, a Blue Whale administrator, Philipp Budeikin, was arrested in May this year, and pleaded guilty to inciting at least 16 teenage girls to commit suicide. He believed that all his victims were “biological waste” who “represented no value to society” and through his challenge, he was merely “cleansing society.”

The 21-year-old started the challenge in 2013 and faces trial. He reportedly suffered from a mental disorder and had an abusive childhood.

What are the signs of someone participating in the challenge?

Parents and teachers must look out for signs of self-harm (like cuts and bruises) and sudden behavioral changes in the child. It’s not just sudden sullenness or withdrawal that you should look out for, but also sudden bursts of over-excitement. Anyone who knows the temperament of the teen should be able to notice them.

UK-based children’s advice group NSPCC lays down some indicators of a child facing online abuse. These are:

- **Spending much more or much less time online, texting, gaming or using social media**
- **The child appearing withdrawn, upset or outraged after using the internet or texting**
- **Secrecy about who they're talking to and what they're doing online or on cell phones**
- **Lots of new phone numbers, texts or e-mail addresses on their mobile phone, laptop or tablet**

Parents should have some sort of monitoring mechanism to keep track of the child's online activity.

How to reach out to troubled teens (with or without Blue Whale involvement)

It helps to speak to the child and validate what they are feeling. Once the child knows that there are others who know about their state of mind, understand them, and can be confided in, they should find it easier to open up and seek help.

However, in the long run, infrequent awareness campaigns about mental health fall short of tackling contemporary mental health challenges, especially given the easy access children have to social media these days.

Mental health should be a small part of the curriculum. It needs to be talked about – between parents and children, educators and students and even peers. Only when there is conversation about these issues will the child know that there are others like him/her and that they are not alone.



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SCHOOL BULLYING—WHAT EDUCATORS CAN DO:

Visit <https://www.stopbullying.gov/what-you-can-do/educators/index.html> and visit a few of the links provided to learn more about how you as an educator can help to stop bullying in your school.

Sex Trafficking /Human Trafficking in Schools

<https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=166&articleid=4465>

Recognizing Signs of Abuse

[Recognize Signs of Child Abuse and Neglect](#)