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## **Suicide Forums in the Dark Web: Psychosocial Dimensions, Youth Vulnerability and Prevention Strategies in Cybersuicidal Greece and Slovakia**

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### **Abstract**

This essay examines the phenomenon of suicide forums in the dark web using material from recent studies published at the widely accessible part of the Internet (surface web). Namely, we clarify the terms “cybersuicide” and “Werther effect”, examine the personality traits that are linked to suicidal tendencies, and analyse the differentiation between the terms “deep web”, “dark net”, and “dark web”, which often get mixed up in everyday use. At the same time, we examine the way suicide is propagated to young people through the dark web forums, report on the basic conversation topics that take place there, study the profiles of the people who constitute them, the motives behind user participation, but also the possibilities for preventing young people’s exposure to these websites. The aim of this essay is to achieve a critical understanding of the ominous but real phenomenon of online communities involved in the issue of suicide in Greece and Slovakia and to shed light on the dangers that lurk for young people who navigate the side of the Internet that hosts as much information as it does dangers.

**Keywords:** Suicide forums, Dark Web, Psychosocial dimensions, prevention strategies, cybersuicidal

### **Introduction**

According to the World Health Organization (2025), suicide is the third leading cause of death worldwide for young people between 15 and 29 years old; 720,000 people take their own lives every year. For every successful suicide

attempt there are countless unsuccessful ones, which are potentially not even mentioned in the health databases. The Internet heavily influences the suicide percentages, as it is possible that in certain cases, it promotes and confers a “heroic” dimension on suicide (Murray, 2011). Thus, in the last few years, the term *Cyber-suicide* has appeared, and is used to talk about online-assisted deaths from suicide (Fratini, Hemer, 2020). Usually, such deaths result from cyberbullying, prompting by unknown users in various communities, acquiring relevant information or the online purchase and use of equipment that facilitates suicide (Chang, Xing, Ho, Yip, 2019).

Moreover, since information funnelled in the Internet is not always checked, there have been several cases where people imitate the actions of others, ending up taking their own lives to get recognition in media outlets. This phenomenon is known in bibliography as *Werther effect* (Fahey, Matsabayashi, Ueda, 2018) and, despite WHO’s warnings to journalists to not mention the method or location where each tragic event occurred, no one can impose this on the online communities (Fratini, Hermer, 2020).

## **Literature Review**

Among the people that seek help from the Internet, there are quite often people who suffer from mental illnesses or have suicidal tendencies (Lester, 1998). Indeed, the degree of intensity of the suicidal ideation appears to be linked not only to neurotic and extroverted personality traits, but also to stress and depression (Stefa-Missagli et al., 2020). When a person with a neurotic personality (that is to say sensitivity to stress, worry, and negative sentiments) does not exhibit elements of depression, then there are greater chances of avoiding suicide. However, if the neurotic traits and the depression are present in a psychiatric patient, then the chances of suicide greatly increase (Stefa-Missagli et al., 2020). Additionally, studies show that people with high levels of neuroticism are in greater risk of been driven into suicidal thoughts or acts from the healthy population. This happens because people often face difficulties in their daily lives, such as separations (e.g. a divorce), lack of employment or lack of social support. These factors have also been linked to greater chances of suicide (Swickert, Hittner, Foster, 2010; Uysal, Pohlmeier, 2011).

All the above characteristics form the image of the more vulnerable users that visit suicide-themed forums in the dark web. The information that they receive during their stay there, potentially intensify the frustration symptoms they feel and amplify their self-destructing tendencies, trapping them in their negative experiences and leading them to suicide (Daine et al., 2013). However, since the Internet comprises communities that differ significantly from one another, it is worth noting here that Internet groups could prevent a user from taking their own life just as much as they can push them to this despicable act (Mokkenstorm et al., 2020).

In this essay, we will attempt to examine what happens within the groups that promote suicide, and reside “deep” in the Internet, while we will also talk about the available means to deal with cybersuicide.

### *Deep Web, Dark Net, and Dark Web*

The term “*Deep Web*” was first used by Bergman (2001) to describe the part of the web that was not accessible by the conventional search engines. In particular, for Bergman deep web is:

1. Special databases accessible that could only be accessed within an organisation.
2. Websites wherein content is visible only after the user subscribes and pays a membership fee.
3. Websites in which content renews each time the user visits them.
4. Webpages that cannot be accessed unless the user searches for them within a specific website.
5. Emails and chat logs.

According to his essay, the deep web is 450 to 500 times larger than the surface web (the easily accessible part of the Internet), while the information it contains is of far better quality than that of the conventional Internet. As examples of deep web, he referenced the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the USA, the academic bibliography search engine JSTOR, the online commerce websites eBay and Amazon, as well as other webpages and online databases, that are still considered deep web today. However, due to the rapid technological progress, the deep web as defined by Bergman has gotten significantly smaller (Hatta, 2020).

Oftentimes in everyday speech, the deep web is confused with the term *Dark Net*. However, those two meanings are not synonyms. Biddle et al. (2003) define the dark net as a collection of networks and technologies that aim at distributing digital content anonymously (Biddle et al., 2003, page 155). The content could be distributed through CDs, USB sticks and/or from user to user through websites or networks the members of which know each other. The issue with these content distribution methods was that, in cases where the law needed to intervene (for example in cases of piracy), tracking the users was easy, since their IP addresses were known as they were not protected by any kind of encoding (Hatta, 2020).

On the other hand, the term *Dark Web* was probably used for the first time around 2009 (Becket, 2009) and significantly differs from the dark net and the deep web. The dark web is only but a small part of the deep web, which a special app or specialised browser is needed to access (Cohen-Almagor, 2017). The most common access method in this part of the Internet is possible through the software platform *TOR* (The Onion Router) (Volle, 2025). *TOR* is a user data encoding software, which effectively helps to browse the Internet anonymously by keeping

the user's IP address hidden under several layers of encoding. It was developed at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory in the mid-1990s; a free version was made open source in 2003. According to data from the software itself, 2.6 million users connect to it daily. Even though TOR originally started with a benevolent goal, the circulation of sensitive information and the carrying out of police investigations, it gradually became a means for distributing malware, pornography, explicit, dangerous or forbidden content, laundering money, exchanging and selling illegal substances, material, guns, drugs, stolen data, and for numerous other malicious activities (Greengard, 2025). Among those activities is the creation of forums where means of taking a user's life are discussed and promoted.

### *The propagation of suicide tendencies to young people through the dark web*

The increasingly worrying trend of teenagers' and young people's engagement with the "suicide subculture" raises reasonable concerns and sounds the alarm for the scientific society. The increase in the younger generation's interest on this subject seems to be tied to the Internet communities of the dark web and the prevalence of suicide challenges in the form of games, such as the Blue Whale Challenge (Surina, 2003). This particular "challenge" gradually drives participants to self-harm with a final task: suicide (Mukhra et al. 2019).

Teenagers are perhaps the most morally and psychologically vulnerable part of society, so its exposure to such dangers under the guise of trends is a major threat to their mental health, even to their life (Surina, 2023). By seeking to join teams both in the real world and online, people tend to come together in groups, the so-called *social networks*, within which they share data, engage with each other and form relationships (Tabassum, Pereira, Fernandes, Gama, 2018). Examples of such a social network are the online "death groups", found in the dark web. There, users share their thoughts and plans about suicide or promote it as a way to solve everyday life's problems. Some of these societies potentially promote suicide as a choice or a form of freedom (Surina, 2023). It is estimated that in Russia alone, 130 people took their own lives from November 2015 to April 2016, and their deaths are connected to "death group" activities (Yablokov, 2017).

In order to join these forums, an encoded connection, such as TOR, is needed. Accessing them is usually simple, allowing minors or mentally vulnerable people to participate. Post moderating is minimum or non-existent, while the anonymity mechanism promotes the lack of responsibility and empathy. For these reasons, communication within forums often includes explicit content. It has been observed that, although dark web forums record many more posts from active users compared to public discussion groups (200 posts per dark web forum user versus 15 posts per active public forum user), influential indivi-

duals are not often identified. In other words, dark forum users engage more with their personal issues or with telling their stories rather than participating in a common discussion under a post (Zamani, Rabbani, Horicsányi, Zafeiris, Vicsek, 2019).

### *Main thematic topics in the pro-suicide forums*

Conversation topics in suicide forums usually revolve around the following categories:

1. Methods and practices of suicide: These include detailed descriptions or evaluations of various methods of suicide, frequently using classifications depending on the “effectiveness”, the “certainty” or the pain. These types of forums strongly affect the user mentality as they don’t leave a lot of room for critical thinking and decision making (Lewis, Seko, 2016).
2. Philosophical or existential subjects: In these forums, suicide is presented as the individual’s choice or as a “release” from misery (Durkee, Hadlaczky, Westerlund, Carli, 2011).
3. Suicide stories: They include posts about completed suicides, sharing the experiences and reasons that led the users to that choice. Oftentimes, the communities of these forums comment approvingly to such posts (Durkee et al., 2011).
4. Toxic “support”: While the community seems to what to support the users, gradually its positions become more and more irrevocable about the fact that pain is unavoidable in life and about suicide being the only solution (Park, Mahdy, Amberman, 2021).

Exposure to any of the above categories of Internet forums may prove dangerous, even fatal, for a vulnerable user.

### *User typology in suicide forums*

Fratini and Hemer (2020) in their studies on livestreamed online suicide note that the individuals who usually participate in relevant forums make up four categories. Firstly, there are the self-proclaimed “experts”, who provide advice or comment on the method of suicide, often suggesting ways to improve or perform the act “correctly”. Very close to this category, we find the so-called “trolls”. Trolls actively encourage suicide, taking advantage of the individual’s vulnerability, to cause turmoil or satisfy sadistic tendencies. On the other hand, there are the “life savers”, who try to prevent people from taking their own life and encourage finding psychological support or, if needed, notify the relevant authorities themselves. Lastly, there is an ambiguous user category, who watch the stream without intervening or commenting, keeping a neutral stance. These users are called “the silent ones” and their motives remain relatively unknown. The researchers assume that behind such profiles are people moved by curiosity or people who found themselves in the platform by mistake.

All these user categories can be found in every kind of forum that promotes suicide and can strongly affect the decision of the individual who attempts to suicide. Acting as the audience, they applaud successful suicide attempts, while every person who finally escapes danger is forced to face their disapproval. Both the experts and the trolls don't easily let the individual change their mind and prevent their own death. According to French (2020), it is extremely difficult for the user who has publicly announced their suicide to retract on their suicidal intention when there is a live audience encouraging them to go through with it.

#### *Causes for participation in suicide forums*

Since, as previously mentioned, suicidal-themed forums are dangerous places, the question is: why would young users visit them? The bibliography indicates that most of them are seeking empathy and support from people going through similar psychological difficulties (Barak, Boniel-Nissim, Suler, 2008). The forums offer a sense of community and acceptance, which are usually missing from young people's real lives. Quite frequently, young people experience intense loneliness and helplessness, are socially disconnected, and believe they have lost their self-worth. They believe their internal gaps can be filled by participating in an online community. Young people could also experience stigma, consider themselves failures regarding achieving expectations or suffer from a mental illness, the existence of which clouds their judgement and overshadows their will to live (Ali, Gibson, 2019). Another equally important factor for turning to dark web forums is anonymity. Hiding one's real identity helps users seamlessly express their views, their thoughts, and their feelings (Oxford University, 2013), while they simultaneously have access to a wealth of information due to the lack of content moderation (Mars et al., 2015).

However, as previously mentioned, the prolonged stay in the Internet involves risks for users' mental and physical integrity, as the content in circulation might normalise and encourage self-harming behaviours and suicide (Sueki, 2015).

### **Research Methodology**

Given that the present paper is theoretical in nature, the methodology followed does not involve quantitative or qualitative collection of primary data. Instead, it was based on a systematic and critical analysis of the existing scientific literature (Cooper, 2015). The main goal was the synthesis of knowledge from the broader framework of education and existing legislation in order to construct a comprehensive conceptual framework that examines the phenomenon of suicide forums on the Dark Web, with a special focus on the vulnerability of youth and prevention strategies in Greece and Slovakia.

## **Analysis-Results**

One of the first discussion topics in the treatment of young people who suffer from mental disorders or harm themselves is the review of their relationship with the Internet (Lewis, Seko, 2015; Marchant et al., 2017). The research performed by Mörch et al. (2018) on dark web webpages about suicide brought to light the fact that there is a scarcity of webpages that engage in suicide prevention by discouraging the broad audience from proceeding with self-harming acts or by offering help to vulnerable users. By combining this data, we can extrapolate that young people browsing the dark web are more likely to come across content that promotes suicide rather than to find support for their troubles. It is thus understandable that protecting them from exposure on the dark web forums related to suicide is a dire need.

It is extremely important for young people to be educated early on the safe ways of surfing the web and to learn to identify dangerous webpages through critical evaluation of their content. They need to be able to tell dangerous or misleading content and steer clear of it (Georgieva et al., 2024).

Schools can contribute to prevent the search for information about suicide on the Internet by strengthening the mental health services they provide the students with. By collaborating with experts, teachers can create a safe environment that allows every student to express their feelings and receive the necessary support and help. Young people should be able to openly talk about their concerns, before they look for answers in dark Internet forums, and receive training that will help them deal with stress, social pressure, sadness, and other feelings they might be having difficulty with (Suicide Prevention Resource Centre, 2020). It is necessary to emphasize the education of adults (i.e. parents, teachers, etc.), so that they would be able to identify warning signs that underage Internet users might show when they are exposed to inappropriate content. The goal is to be able to intervene in time and help if necessary (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022).

### *Cyber-suicide prevention methods in Greece*

Additionally, parents should stay informed by credible sources, such as the Ministry of Digital Governance and the Greek Police, about the dangers lurking in the Internet and about the methods they can use to mitigate them. Such methods are installing computer activity tracking software or malware and inappropriate content filtering software, as well as regularly checking the browsing history. Already there are several government apps that help parents check on their children's online activity, such as Kids Wallet and the parco.gov.gr platform, which contains clear guidelines on how to install parental control on the electronic devices used by minors. Moreover, it should be noted that open dialogue with the younger

generation, especially about such sensitive topics, is of paramount importance and could prevent great dangers (Ministry of Digital Governance et al., 2024).

Naturally, the contribution of bigger organisations, such as social networking platforms and search engines, is also necessary. They, in turn, should work together with mental health organisms and show users supportive content when they research topics like “how to kill myself” (Borge et al., 2021). Artificial intelligence could also be used through implementation of machine learning technologies to identify concerning behaviour or keywords in users’ online activity. Such an app is presented in Van Herk’s (2023) postgraduate essay.

The World Health Organization (2017) offers a full guide about suicide prevention, meant for mental health specialists. Among others, it mentions that it is important for experts to openly discuss the topic with their patients, educate them in methods of handling difficult emotions, provide psychological support and empowerment, but also advise them on where to find valid sources of information and support for the issues they are concerned about. Additionally, mental health specialists must be equipped to provide proper support to caretakers of people that experience suicidal ideation, so they can frame the issue correctly and achieve optimal therapy results.

Lastly, it is necessary for the state to take measures, such as the advocacy of legislative initiatives to protect minors on the Internet. Illegal webpages that circulate on the surface and in the dark web should be identified and taken down by the police authority responsible for online safety, the Cyber Crime Division (Hellenic Police, 2022).

In general, a coordinated multilevel effort from all the institutions is needed in order to limit and effectively deal with the risks of inappropriate content exposure, such as what is circulated in the dark web suicidal forums (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2024).

#### *Cyber-suicide prevention methods in Slovakia*

Cyber suicides represent a serious societal and public health issue, particularly in relation to the growing influence of the digital environment on the mental health of young people. The aim of this paper is to identify and evaluate methods of cyber suicide prevention in Slovakia, with a focus on institutional strategies and interdisciplinary interventions.

The most significant pillar is online crisis support provided by organizations such as IPčko and the *Chcem sa zabit'* ("I want to die") project. These platforms operate continuously, offering anonymous and free assistance via chat, email, or telephone, and often intervene directly in online environments. (IPčko, 2025.; Chcemsazabit.sk, 2022). Additionally, IPčko carries out specialized online outreach

work aimed at identifying at-risk groups and intervening within online communities (IPčko, 2021).

Another crucial aspect is media awareness, which reflects the recommendations of the World Health Organization regarding responsible communication about suicide (NCZI, 2025). In the context of the World Suicide Prevention Day (September 10), awareness campaigns emphasize empathy, destigmatization, and the active search for help (TASR, 2024; SME, 2024).

The school environment also plays an irreplaceable role. Teachers are equipped with professional methodological guides that help them identify warning signs, strengthen students' mental health, and respond appropriately to crisis situations (Bertolote, 2007).

A comparative overview of the cyber-suicide prevention initiatives and policies implemented in Slovakia and Greece is presented in Table 1

**Table 1. An overview of the cyber-suicide prevention initiatives and policies implemented in Slovakia and Greece**

	Greece	Slovakia
Primary Focus	Parental control, legislative action, and source removal.	Online crisis intervention, outreach, and public awareness.
Key Actors	Ministry of Digital Governance, Greek Police (Cyber Crime Division), schools, parents.	NGOs (IPčko, "I want to die" project), media, schools.
Technological Approach	Use of government apps (Kids Wallet) and parental control software for monitoring and filtering.	Online chat/email support and specialized online outreach to at-risk users in their communities.
Educational & Media Role	Government platforms (parco.gov.gr) provide guidelines for parents. Emphasis on open dialogue within the family.	Media follows WHO guidelines for responsible reporting. Nationwide awareness campaigns (e.g., World Suicide Prevention Day).
Institutional & Legal Measures	Advocacy for laws to protect minors. Police action to identify and take down illegal websites on the surface and dark web.	Schools are equipped with methodological guides for teachers to identify warning signs and support students.
Overall Strategy	A model focusing on limiting exposure to harmful content through control and enforcement.	A model focusing on crisis intervention, outreach, and destigmatization through public engagement.

In conclusion, effective cyber suicide prevention requires technologically supported assistance, active media engagement with the topic, and a well-prepared educational environment. Moving forward, it is recommended that collaboration between state institutions, the education sector, and mental health professionals be further strengthened.

## **Discussion – conclusion**

The cyber-suicide phenomenon, as showcased through the dark sides of the Internet and, more specifically, through the digital communities of the dark web, constitutes a complex, multifactored, and deeply concerning threat for modern

society. A particular concern rises when the threat in question turns against the most vulnerable population groups, notably teenagers and young adults. This essay attempted to investigate this phenomenon not only as an individual expression of mental discontent, but mostly as a product of a collective reinforcement in the context of a deregulated digital environment that allows and/or encourages the replication of suicidal ideas. As the analysis of suicidal forums of the dark web has indicated, the platforms in question function as hubs of anonymous, unmoderated interaction. The lack of institutional moderation and the lack of empathy that govern these communities render the distribution of pathological content extremely easy. More specifically, the prevailing discussion topics in these spaces reveal the users' psychological burdening, while a deeper cultural transposition, where suicide is portrayed as an alternative solution or as a form of personal liberation, is also perceived.

At the same time, the analysis of the participation motives in suicidal forums has demonstrated that people's need for social acceptance, communication, and psychological release often works deceptively. It is possible that, due to the deficiencies in the above domains, Internet users could be directed towards dangerous environments. Several times, the lack of psycho-societal support in the real world translates in a search for one's identity and for understanding in the digital world. When this fact is combined with vulnerable personalities, the potential for influence and manipulation from members of the suicidal communities is increased.

As such, it becomes clear that dealing with the phenomenon of cybersuicide cannot be limited to isolated efforts or individual interferences. On the contrary, forming a multifactored and cross-scientific prevention and interference framework is needed. Families, schools, the scientific community, the mental health institutions, and the state in its entirety must get mobilised and together contribute to the efforts of protecting mental health, and to young people's education. Advances in artificial intelligence have revolutionized the development of suicide screening tools and suicide risk detection systems. Thus, various types of AI systems, including text-based systems and social media, have been proposed to identify individuals at risk of suicide (Castillo-Sánchez et al., 2020; Parsapoor, Koudys, Ruocco, 2023). This way, the ultimate goal of protecting the younger generation's wellbeing could be achieved, thus securing the future of our society.

Despite differing implementation frameworks, Greece and Slovakia share common pillars in their fight against cyber-suicide: leveraging online platforms for support and awareness and integrating mental health principles into education. The primary distinction emerges in their operational focus. Slovakia has developed advanced psychosocial intervention models directly within digital environments, whereas Greece places greater emphasis on regulatory frameworks and technological tools for shielding minors. This juxtaposition suggests that an ideal model would synergize proactive support with preventative safeguards.

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