

## **PSY152A-APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY**

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# WHO CAN TAKE UP THE BLUE WHALE CHALLENGE?

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Basic problem

The Blue Whale Game, also known as "Blue Whale Challenge", is a 21st-century social network phenomenon that is claimed to exist in several countries, beginning in 2016. The game reportedly consists of a series of tasks assigned to players by administrators over a 50-day period, with the final challenge requiring the player to commit suicide. Philipp Budeikin who invented Blue Whale suicide 'game' aimed at children says that " *My victims who kill themselves are 'biological waste' and that he is 'cleansing society'* ".

Budeikin claimed that he gave those people "warmth", "understanding" and "contact" and that the kids who committed suicide because of him died happily. "There are people - and there is biological waste. Those who do not represent any value for society. Who cause or will cause only harm to society. I was cleaning our society of such people" , Budeikin said during an interview with Saint Petersburg News. From the number of deaths that this game has caused shows us that the mental health of the children is so deteriorated that it has led to instances of imitative self-harming. Due to this the children are so vulnerable to cyberbullying and online shaming.

### 1.2. Situation in which the problem is embedded

India is known as the suicide capital of the world and has 63,000 annual suicides in the age group of 10-24 according to data released in 2013. There are hundreds of suicide groups online which vulnerable minds join. The blue whale challenge also grew out of one such online suicide group.

Many youngsters suffering from some form of mental health issues may be trying it out themselves. There are so many issues that these kids are facing, academic pressure, bullying, loneliness. There are so many causes for their disturbance and we do nothing to address those. Though, we are making a song and dance about this challenge. There's so much hype with the government and politicians jumping in. But in the end the actual problem resides in so mental problems that the children and young people are facing now-a-days.

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### 1.3. Response that we are interested in looking at

There had been a lot many deaths because of blue whale challenge. But it is just a case, the main problem lies in mental health of people. So, we will try to find out the factors affecting mental health and develop some methods to find out that a particular individual is facing these problems or not, so that he/she could be saved falling for things like Blue Whale Challenge which corrupts their minds.

## 2. Review Of Literature

### 2.1. The Psychology of the Blue Whale Challenge

The psychology of blue whale challenge as explained by John M. Grohol, Psy.D. ,the founder CEO of Psych Centralis:

The psychology behind the blue whale challenge is simple find victims, create an emotional bond with them through an arbitrary set of steps demanding completion in order to move forward in the game, and then hope they follow through to Step 50, Jump off a high building. Take your life.

This is the creation of someone who is likely a psychopath or sociopath, or has significant tendencies of psychopathy. This game isnt really a game at all. Its simply a control and manipulation scheme directed toward vulnerable people who have serious thoughts of suicide, loneliness, and death.

When a person is suicidal, they feel most of all alone and worthless. The game creator understood these feelings (probably having felt them themselves at some point in their lives), and is taking advantage of these kinds of feelings.

What better way to make someone feel like they are together with others than have them identify as an arbitrary mammal (a whale)? And what better way to make them feel a little less worthless than have them succeed at a series of tasks anyone could perform?

### 2.2. What pushes children into this?

As mentioned in an article in the Indian Express by a leading columnist Ishita Sengupta on the Blue Whale Challenge, the factors which influence the children/teens to take up the blue whale challenge are as follows:

- Parenting- The drawbacks in present parenting style and reducing social time with the parents, increases the children's time spent on digital devices.
- The game gives the children what they don't have in real life; the warmth, understanding, and connections.
- Children feel being under the spotlight while playing game, contrary to the isolation in real life.
- Mental health taboo- India still considers seeking help for mental health issues a taboo.
- While this is the condition with adults themselves, guiding a child appropriately in mental health issues is even more challenging.
- Guidance from a mental health professional is a least thought out option.
- Given this, games like the Blue Whale challenge, offer the players - the children and teenagers in their privacy, the attention and validation that they yearn for.
- Schools are as integral a part of shaping a child's psyche as parenting is.
- Kids being isolated in schools for various reasons are often unnoticed by the teachers and the management.
- Counselling professionals being part of the school and addressing these issues are very rare, especially in the Indian context.

The isolated children seeking social approval and acceptance, are attracted to the options where they are given these.

### 3. Underlying Variables, Theory and Hypothesis

#### UNDERLYING VARIABLES

##### INDEPENDANT VARIABLES:

##### 1. Depression

From reading various articles about the activities and background history of the victims of the deadly game, we found out that this is one of the major reasons of taking up such kind of pathetic tasks and falling into the pit. So basically, in our study we will try to judge whether our participants (mostly teenagers) have signs of depression or not? With the advent of social media, increasing competition, nuclear families and peer pressure, we just cannot ignore the fact that depression is a big issue with kids these days and thus the admins of the game target such teens directly.

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## **2. Loneliness**

Well nuclear families. Parents dont have time for kids these days. They are mostly busy with their jobs and other things. Although, this problem of loneliness is more common in a teen with no siblings, we cannot ignore the possibility of it affecting even the kids with siblings. It is easy for the admin of the game to manipulate such vulnerable teens as they feel Atleast somebody is concerned about me . So it becomes extremely important for us to judge from the activities of a teen, whether he is feeling lonely/cut away from the world or not.

## **3. Inferiority complex**

The feeling Everybody is better than me is the worst feeling for any common man, let alone teens. The nature of feeling jealous of each and every achievement of a friend, feeling low after somebody outperforms them makes them feel absolutely devastated and they start question their existence. Now when they come to know about such a game, they find it the best opportunity to prove to the world that they are worth something, that they can do things which their superiors cant do, and at the same time free themselves from this bad world. Thus studying inferiority becomes important.

## **4. Aggression/Violence**

Teens nowadays watch a lot of action movies, play a lot of action games on mobile phones and PCs . Many of them bring this virtual thing to real life and hence are more violent than others. Since the blue whale game is a self harming gaming where the victims various tools to injure himself, they find the game as an adventure to Death like any other normal violent adventurous game. So measuring the level of frustration and aggression in a teen and linking it directly to taking up the Blue whale Challenge is absolutely justified.

## **DEPENDANT VARIABLE:**

### **Taking up the Blue Whale Challenge**

We will see how the tendency of taking up the challenge varies with varying the amount of depression, loneliness, inferiority and anger in our targeted audience (teens basically).

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## THEORY

The variable discussed above have a direct proportionality in determining how prone the person for falling for mind corruptions like The Blue Whale Challenge. And as more and more of these variables are seen in a person, the person becomes more prone of falling into the trap. And because the people in our society are still affected by these variables, The Blue Whale Challenge can still be acquired by many people of this modern social era.

## HYPOTHESIS

**People in the society are still prone to the THE BLUE WHALE CHALLENGE**

The basic problem is that people don't even realise that their mental state has reached to an extent that they take up such pathetic challenge without giving a second thought. That is why after it comes out that the blue whale challenge was the reason for the peculiar activities or even sometimes death of their loved ones, they feel astonished and it is a huge shock to them. So basically, our problem comes down analysing whether a person is unknowingly suffering from the conditions( variables) mentioned below:

## 4. Methods

The major part of our methods that go about in proving our hypothesis include questionnaires which can judge if a person has fallen prone to any of the following underlying variables -

- Depression
- Loneliness
- Inferiority Complex
- Violence/Aggression

## DEPRESSION

**1. Do you have unexpected, intense sadness that lasts longer than a few days at a time?**

Unless a major life change, such as an illness, divorce, or loss of job has occurred, long-lasting sadness isn't a great sign.

**2. Are you experiencing thoughts of suicide?**

If you are imagining that the world would be a better place without you, or if you think

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the only way you'll ever be happy is by harming yourself.

**3. Are you fatigued or lacking in energy?**

People who are depressed often feel drained for days or weeks at a time. They may be unable to get out of bed or go to work.

**4. At times, do you have feelings of hopelessness?**

Believing that your life will never improve or get better, or that you're stuck in a situation you can't control, can be a sign of depression.

**5. Are you using alcohol or drugs to manage your mood?**

People who are depressed will often use alcohol or drugs to try and manage their feelings of sadness.

**6. Have your eating patterns changed ?**

Some people engage in overeating, while others have a hard time consuming food and lose weight.

**7. Have you lost interest in activities you used to enjoy?**

Going out with friends, attending sporting events, exercising and sexual activity are all things that often stop when a person experiences depression.

**8. Do you feel worthless or guilty more often than you think you should?**

Depression can cause people to experience guilty feelings when they have done nothing wrong.

**9. Are you losing your temper or fighting more than you used to?**

For some people, their sadness or depression comes out as anger. Teens may get into fights at school; adults may argue or scream at their spouses.

**10. Are you becoming more irritable?**

Like anger or hostility, increasing irritability can be a sign of depression.

We will ask the participants these 10 questions framed by our team (based on our findings and research), and if the answer to 6 or more questions is YES, based on our readings, we can almost surely say that the participant is **depressed**.

## **LONELINESS**

**1. How often do you feel unhappy doing so many things alone?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

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**2. How often do you feel you have nobody to talk to?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

**3. How often do you feel you cannot tolerate being so alone?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

**4. How often do you feel as if nobody really understands you?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

**5. How often do you find yourself waiting for people to call or write?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

**6. How often do you feel completely alone?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

**7. How often do you feel you are unable to reach out and communicate with those around you?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

**8. How often do you feel starved for company?**



- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

**9. How often do you feel it is difficult for you to make friends?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

**10. How often do you feel shut out and excluded by others?**

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

NEVER = 0 POINTS                      RARELY = 5 POINTS

SOMETIMES = 10 POINTS      OFTEN = 20 POINTS

If the overall total score of the participant in the above quiz is more than 100, then based on our findings we can safely assume that the participant is suffering from loneliness.

## AGGRESSION(Buss Perry aggression questionnaire)

Questions	Extremely uncharacteristic	Somewhat uncharacteristic	Neither uncharacteristic nor characteristic	Somewhat characteristic	Extremely characteristic
1.Some of my friends think I am a hothead.					
2.If I have to resort to violence to protect my rights, I will.					
3.When people are especially nice to me, I wonder what they want.					
4.I tell my friends openly when I disagree with them.					
5.I have become so mad that I have broken things.					
6.I cant help getting into arguments when people disagree with me.					
7.I wonder why sometimes I feel so bitter about things.					
8.Once in a while, I cant control the urge to strike another person.					
9.I am an even-tempered person.					

10.I am suspicious of overly friendly strangers.					
11.I have threatened people I know.					
12.I flare up quickly but get over it quickly.					
13.Given enough provocation, I may hit another person.					
14.When people annoy me, I may tell them what I think of them.					
15.I am sometimes eaten up with jealousy.					
16.I can think of no good reason for ever hitting a person.					
17.At times I feel I have gotten a raw deal out of life.					
18.I have trouble controlling my temper.					
19.When frustrated, I let my irritation show.					
20.I sometimes feel that people are laughing at me behind my back.					
21.I often find myself disagreeing with people.					
22.If somebody hits me, I hit back.					
23.I sometimes feel like a powder keg ready to explode.					
24.Other people always seem to get the breaks.					
25.There are people who pushed me so far that we came to blows.					
26.I know that "friends" talk about me behind my back.					
27.My friends say that I'm somewhat argumentative.					
28.Sometimes I fly off the handle for no good reason.					
29.I get into fights a little more than the average person.					

If this famous Buss Perry aggression questionnaire test on aggression comes out to be positive, the person is suffering from *aggression*.

## INFERIORITY COMPLEX

**1. Do you feel offended when somebody criticises you, even though from inside you know that the criticism is spot-on?**

Although people who feel inferior know they have shortcomings, they do not like other people to point this out. They tend to perceive any form of criticism, regardless of how sensitively or constructively it is presented, as a personal attack.

**2. Do you feel that you are in a habit of pointing out mistakes/flaws of others ?**

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People who do not feel good about themselves have trouble feeling good about anyone else. They look hard for flaws and shortcomings of others to try to convince themselves that they really aren't so bad after all. These people cannot feel intelligent, attractive, competent, etc., unless they are the most intelligent, attractive and competent person around.

### **3. Do you love being flattered/praised all the time ?**

This can work two ways. Some people are desperate to hear anything good about themselves and will be constantly fishing for compliments. Others may refuse to listen to anything positive about themselves because it is inconsistent with their own feelings.

### **4. Do you try to blame others for your failure ?**

Some people project their perceived weaknesses onto others in order to lessen the pain of feeling inferior. From here, it is only a short step to blaming others for one's failures.

### **5. Do you often feel that the entire world is against you, and none is your well-wisher?**

Carried to its extreme, blaming others can extend to believing that others are actively seeking to ruin you. If a man is fired from his job, for example, it may comfort him to believe that his boss was out to get him. It allows him to avoid personal responsibility for his failure.

### **6. Do you try to avoid competitions?**

People who feel inferior like to win games and contests every bit as anyone else, but they tend to avoid such situations because deep down, they believe they cannot win. And not coming in first is clear evidence of total failure.

### **7. Do you think a lot about your dressing sense, physical stature and other related things before going to a party, gathering?**

Because people with an inferiority complex believe that they are not as interesting or intelligent as others, they believe that other people will feel the same way about them. So they tend to avoid social situations, and when they are forced to be with others, they will avoid speaking up because they believe doing so will only provide an embarrassing demonstration of their dullness and stupidity.

### **8. Do you feel that you are addicted to being jealous of your friend's success ?**

Studies suggest that jealousy has a direct correlation with inferiority.

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## 5. Expected Results

Based on the responses of the questionnaire for all four variables, we can classify our targeted audience into following categories:

### 1. Most vulnerable Group

Those who are positive to all the four tests that we conducted, they are the ones who are most likely to take up such devastating challenges as the Blue Whale Game. Their mental health is in such a situation that they can be most easily manipulated by the admins.

### 2. Vulnerable Group

Those who are positive to two/three of the four tests fall in this category. Though they are less susceptible than the first group we cannot ignore the possibility of them taking up such challenges.

### 3. Least vulnerable Group

Those who are positive to any one of the four tests fall in this category. Though they had been positive to only one variable but still they need a psychiatric attention. A single one of them in longer run can deteriorate the mental health of an individual to a large extent.

### 4. The Happy Group

These are the people who are not suffering from any of these mental problem. These are the people who inspire the world and make the society a happy place to live in.

## 6. Possible Implications of the proposed study in real life

Appropriate measures can be taken to prevent the teenagers from taking up such challenges. Some of the measures are-

- The above mentioned questionnaire can be used to identify those individuals who opt for the challenge. If they fail in the test/ found to be with poor mental health mentioned above then they can be prevented from accessing to such challenges.
- This method may be conducted in schools and colleges. Parents should be shown the results of these conducts and asked to keep track of their child's social media activities and look for any sudden changes in behaviour of their child.
- By conducting this methodology teachers can give proper attention to the suspected individuals and people can be taken care of from the school level itself.
- Professionals can apply this methodology to provide proper counselling to the suspected victims.

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