



## **Study of the influence of mass media on the formation of suicidal thoughts among adolescents**

**BOTAGOZ BAYMUKHAMBETOVA<sup>1</sup>, NADEZHDA OGIYENKO<sup>2</sup>, RAKHIMA IBRAYEVA<sup>3</sup>, LYAYLYA NURMAGAMBETOVA<sup>4</sup>, NATAL'YA KOVSH<sup>5</sup> and IGOR SHILOV<sup>6</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, PhD, Head of the Department of Science, International Relations, Kostanay State Pedagogical Institute, Kazakhstan

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Head of the Department of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism, Kostanay State Pedagogical Institute, Kazakhstan

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Department of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism, Kostanay State Pedagogical Institute, Kazakhstan.

<sup>4</sup>Candidate of Economic Sciences, Department of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism, Kostanay State Pedagogical Institute, Kazakhstan

<sup>5</sup>Senior Lecturer, Department of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism, Kostanay State Pedagogical Institute, Kazakhstan

<sup>6</sup>Senior Lecturer, Department of Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism, Kostanay State Pedagogical Institute, Kazakhstan

### **ABSTRACT**

The article highlights the results of an online survey of adolescents on the study of the mass media influence on the formation of suicidal thoughts and the analysis of sites devoted to the topic of suicides. It was revealed that the majority of adolescents are active users of the Internet and adolescents often face information about suicide in social networks, on information sites. The study also showed that the formation of suicidal behavior in adolescents is most affected by the dominance of cruelty and crime on television, leading to the introduction in the minds of adolescents of the notion of "everyday" violence and death, including murder and suicide; Also computer games aimed at the formation of cruelty, frivolous, or romantic attitude towards death in adolescents. Content analysis of sites devoted to the subject of suicide testifies that on the Internet it is possible to freely find whole sites and groups with detailed descriptions of the methods of suicide without any restrictions that push teenagers to the last point, and detailed stories of suicides cause the desire to imitate the other teenagers. Based on the results of the study, the article presents a number of recommendations on the specifics of media coverage of information about suicides.

**Keywords:** suicidal behavior, suicidal thoughts, adolescence, suicide, mass media, Internet

### **INTRODUCTION**

The problem of the influence of the mass media on the formation of suicidal thoughts among adolescents is very relevant in our modern society, as today the majority of the population is represented by the younger generation (more than 30%), and the media is the "fourth power", which has a huge influence on the formation of teenagers' opinion, the upbringing of adolescents, etc. (Akhmadishina and Korosteleva 2015). Free access to unlimited

information resources, first of all, to a large number of television channels, various printed publications, as well as open access to the Internet (including using a mobile phone) helps the teenager to find an answer to any question that arises. Because teenagers are very inquisitive and want to keep abreast of all the events taking place not only in their city but all over the world. The younger generation forms their opinions and tastes by almost one hundred percent thanks to magazines, entertainment television, and the Internet. If earlier this source

was school, family, parents, now they are replaced by the media (Zhilavskaya 2007). But the child's psyche in adolescence is vulnerable enough. Increased criticality in relation to adults, an acute reaction to attempts by others to diminish their dignity, to belittle their adulthood, to underestimate their legal capabilities are the causes of frequent conflicts in adolescence (Rean 2005). Therefore, in critical situations for them are characteristic beliefs "it is better not to live at all if you can not earn recognition, approval" or "life does not make sense, because I was rejected, ridiculed", "do not even try to communicate with others, I will be rejected ..." etc (Vagin 2001).

According to J. Sareen, T. Houlahan, B.J. Cox, suicidal thoughts come to mind in a stressful evaluation situation, a mediation of emotions and behavior decreases, an impulsiveness increases. An inverted value system ("be recognized or die") creates a high degree of youth vulnerability to stressors associated with rejection, mockery, negative evaluation in a broad sense (Sareen and Houlahan, 2005).

Gladding S. believes that the emergence of suicidal thoughts in adolescence is a reaction of a teenager to a problem that seems insurmountable to him (Gladding 2002).

The theme of suicidal thoughts in adolescence is serious enough and requires reflection on the real reasons that push a teenager to such a "new" life. Such thoughts can result in the adolescent's suicide, which ranks third among causes of death in adolescence. According to statistics, every three seconds in the world one teenager thinks about the uselessness and meaninglessness of life (Zhuravlev and Yefremov 2004). It is the presence of social and psychological problems, in the opinion of Krasnova V.V., Kholmogorova A.B., that leads to suicidal attempts (violence, aggression and cruelty, a sense of loneliness) (Krasnova and Kholmogorova 2013).

Often adolescents who have suicidal thoughts or resort to suicide, believes A.N. Volkova, have relatives or acquaintances who commit suicide, abuse alcohol, and drugs, they are characterized by attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other behavioral disorders, depression, anxiety (Volkova 1998). According to the studies of Sagalakova O.A., Truyevtseva D.V., among teenagers, there was a tendency to frequent group suicides, which followed "literally one after another" (Sagalkova and Truyevtsev 2014).

Psychiatrists also point to teenage cravings for imitation and detailed coverage of suicides in the media is a provocative factor for the immature consciousness of adolescents (Correspondent 2009-2016). Many cases are covered in detail in the media. Experts have long discussed the influence of the media, for example, articles in newspapers or TV shows about specific cases of suicide on suicidal thoughts of adolescents. It is believed that media publications about suicides can cause imitating suicides in a relevant age or social group, often referred to as the "infection effect" or "Werther syndrome" by analogy with the novel of the eighteenth century written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

In Kazakhstan, according to a poll conducted by the Center for Scientific and Educational Innovation and Monitoring, 92.6% of adolescents receive information from the Internet, and 6.6% from TV. About 3.5% of teenagers said they receive news from newspapers, and 3.2% from the radio. In addition, 26.1% gave priority to books and 9% - to magazines.

Thus, the research data show that the Internet is filling the majority of adolescents' leisure time (Polishchuk). In this regard, we decided to analyze the Internet sites for the formation of suicidal thoughts and conduct an online questionnaire among adolescents for the presence of suicidal thoughts.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The content analysis is a method of quantitative semantics, which allows revealing data on how often information about suicide and its methods is found. We were guided by the basic rules on the use and reception of media influence, including the Internet. From the standpoint of these rules, we considered the violation or compliance with these rules (The Kazakhstan rating). Our sample was made up of sites that are the most popular and in our study, we analyzed these sites in terms of how these sites cover issues related to suicide. These criteria were taken as a basis: negative news about the suicide on the front page of the publication, the sharp submission of information, its volume, the excessive emotionality, the description of suicide as a heroic deed and an exit from the situation, etc., positive - a description of the problem along with successes and victories, the suicide is a consequence of a complex of psychological and social problems, mental disorders, deviant behavior, etc.

To study the influence of the media on the formation of suicidal thoughts of adolescents, we developed a special questionnaire that suggested the choice of one or more options for an answer. At the same time, we decided to conduct our questionnaire using the Internet as subjects are often more frank there, which avoids distortion of data due to social desirability.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the study, we proceeded from the fact that the Internet more than other types of media contributes to the formation of suicidal thoughts of adolescents, its negative impact is determined, firstly, by the availability of thematic sites dedicated to the promotion of suicidal activities; Secondly, the form of submission of material presented on the sites for the prevention of suicidal behavior.

Our study included three stages: theoretical, practical, final.

At the first stage of the work, criteria were developed for content analysis of sites with a suicidal orientation, a special Internet questionnaire was developed.

At the second stage - the sites were analyzed for the formation of suicidal thoughts, a questionnaire was conducted among adolescents for the presence of suicidal thoughts.

On the third, final - their interpretations are given, recommendations for school psychologists, parents of teenagers are developed.

We conducted an online study, which took place in April 2017 in the social network "Vkontakte", popular today among adolescents. 770 people were interviewed. The survey involved teenagers aged 14 to 16 years. Closed-ended questions were proposed suggesting the choice of one or more options for an answer. To obtain the most reliable information, the questioned were informed that the questionnaire was anonymous and its data will not be used for any other purposes than as a research analysis. Filling the questionnaire took no more than 2 minutes for teenagers.

The online questionnaire included several questions related to the study of the influence of the media on the formation of suicidal thoughts among adolescents.

The following results of our study were obtained, which are reflected in the tables and diagrams.

The answer to the question "The main source of information for you" is: the press - 5%, the radio - 2%, the television - 31%, the parents / family - 1%, the friends - 0%, the colleagues (classmates, co-workers) - 1%, Internet - 60% of respondents.

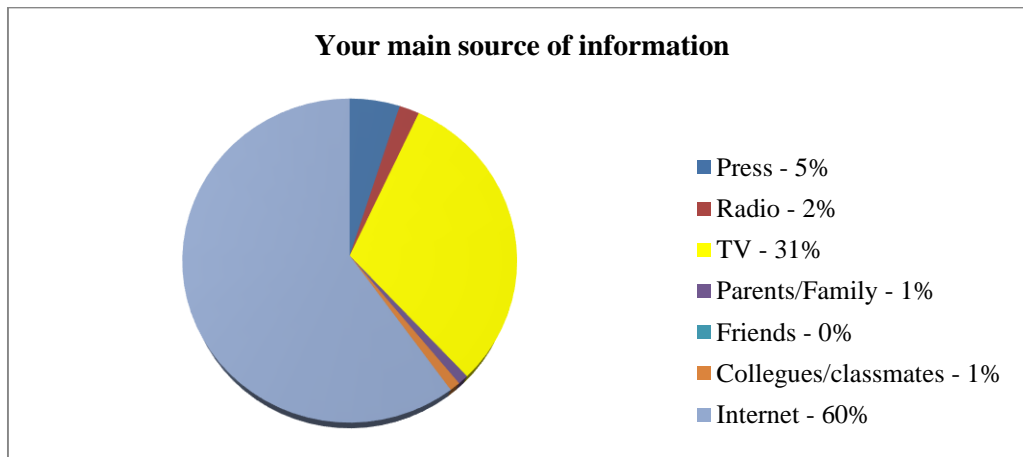


FIGURE 1

**Diagram "The main source of information"**

Analysis of the data obtained shows that the Internet is the main source of information for adolescents. For 60% of respondents, the Internet is the main source of information. In addition, half of the respondents (50%) trust information received on the Internet and do not double-check information through other sources.

The next question is "What in your opinion has the greatest impact on the formation of suicidal behavior in adolescents?" The presence

of directly propagandizing resources on the Internet and social networks - 17%, the prevalence of cruelty and crime on television, leading to the introduction of the mindset of adolescents about the "sameness" of violence and death, including murder and suicide - 28%, computer games aimed at forming cruelty, frivolous, or romantic attitude to death in adolescents - 40%, other - 15%. This is clearly shown in the diagram (Figure 2).

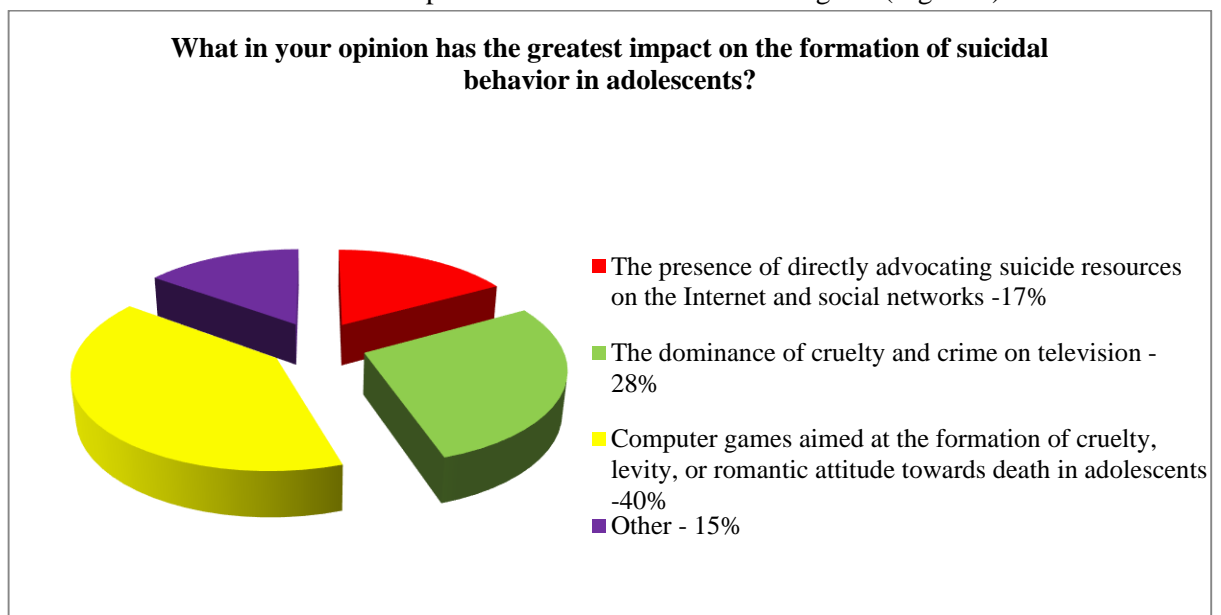


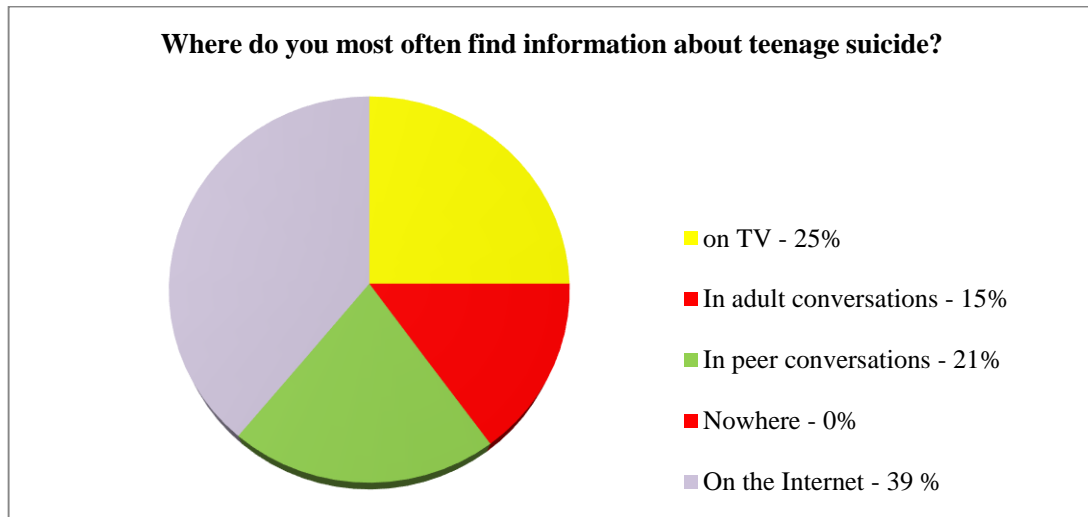
FIGURE 2

**Diagram "What in your opinion has the greatest impact on the formation of suicidal behavior in adolescents?"**

Analysis of the data obtained shows that the majority of respondents (40%) believe that computer games are most influential in shaping suicidal behavior in adolescents, aimed at forming cruelty, frivolous, or romantic attitude towards death in adolescents.

Answering the question "Where do you most often find information about teenage suicide?", the questioned responded like this: on television, in news bulletins, documentaries - 25%, in adult conversations - 15%, in conversations with peers - 21%, believe that information is not found anywhere - 0%, on the

Internet, on social networks, on information sites - 39%.



**FIGURE 3**

### "Where often you find information about teenage suicide?"

The analysis of the obtained data shows that the majority of respondents (39%) meets information about teenage suicide on the Internet: on social networks, on information sites, etc.

Thus, based on the results of the questionnaire, that the main source of information among adolescents is the Internet, we analyzed the top most popular sites among adolescents in our country. According to LiveInternet.ru ([www.liveinternet.ru/stat/ru/](http://www.liveinternet.ru/stat/ru/)), widespread on the Internet, the search preferences of teenagers were concentrated on three main search engines: Yandex - 50.9%; Google - 33.8%; Search Mail.ru - 8.6% (Vampire Freaks).

When we googled "suicide", the system issued over 4 million Internet resources.

On these sites, you can without any restrictions read articles on the topic "suicide", and in the "Pictures" section of the same sites, you can watch thematic pictures. The system issued more than 235 000 pictures at the request. The first picture shows a hanging teddy bear, the second one gives a link to the website <http://vampirefreaks.com/>; The third shows a young model-like girl who slit her wrists in a bathtub, etc. In total, approximately 60% of the

"pictures" issued at our request, in a vivid, visual form, showed acts of suicide (13 Goths ).

Such images represent not just pictures, but creolized texts that combine verbal and non-verbal communication: by inducing the cursor on the image of a teddy bear, the recipient sees the signature "Ode to suicides", the image of a girl who slit her wrists - "A surge of suicides", and putting the cursor on the image of a girl shooting herself in the mouth with a pistol, from the back of her head, blood and brains are scattered, the recipient displays the phrase: "Look at the picture, envy, follow the example." Without difficulty, using one of the services of Yandex, you can find a link, for example, to a site focused on representatives of the goth subculture, where among other things there is a "photo album" of 6 stylized pictures devoted to the subject of suicide (Loss of soul).

Creolized texts acquire special significance. It is the language of visualization, in the opinion of a number of researchers, that can become an international language because it meets the need to optimize human interaction to achieve a higher level of efficiency; It meets the need to overcome the hidden stereotypes of the literary language; It can contribute to a nonlinear, more open character of new human experiences.

When you hover the cursor, the images give a link to the site, which, as a rule, contains the signatures to the "picture". At the same time, on the request of "suicide", the system offers several photo galleries formed on the basis of user requests: "Suicide Emo", "Suicide due to love", "Suicide anime", "Suicide pistol", "Suicide Hanging". Despite the fact that the Internet resources position themselves as "life projects", the texts of the sites dip into a depressing atmosphere. Here is just one quote from the text posted in the section "loss of soul": "This is a world of non-existence. It is impossible to get there yourself. "Loss of soul" comes by himself, and one day everything disappears, and "loss of soul" becomes an entire world. From here it is impossible to leave at will, although you can always try". The effect produced by this fragment of the text is strengthened by epigraphs, which are quotations from R.M. Rilke and A. Rambo. Precedent names and precedent statements contribute to the enhancement of the semantic-cognitive background (The last step – into emptiness).

Along with thematic links, the search engines of the sites give hyperlinks to the same thematic videos in "Youtube", for example, which is shot on an amateur camera as a young suicide girl, fighting off rescuers, jumps from the eaves of the high-rise building (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2n8FV46p5Yw>); Hyperlink to the suicide forum (<http://samoubiistvo.ru/forum/viewforum.php?f=1>); A hyperlink to a site registered in Ukraine, which published a repost of the poem "Make a suicide", which is called "genius" on the site (<http://muromec.org.ua/repost/suicide/>), etc.

Situations in the search engines "Mail.ru", "Nur Kz", are actually similar to the situation in the search system "Yandex". On the entered inquiry "suicide" the system gives out over 5 million results. As in the search engines described above, on "Vkontakte" in the "Images" section, a huge array of creolized texts (more than 35,000 "pictures" are fixed) is contained. Some are sorted by sub-sections: "Suicide among teenagers", "Wrists slit", "Suicide methods", "Suicide pictures",

"Loneliness", "Death", "Suicide", "Leap from the roof".

On the sites of NUR.KZ, ZAKON.KZ: News of Kazakhstan and the World, informBURO, 365info.kz, the analytics, news about suicide issued on the front page of the publication, sharp information submission, the volume of information is not taken into account, excessive emotionality is present, suicidal facts are described as exits from difficult situations.

And on the Kazakhstan site "Life Quests" even a survey is conducted: "What kind of suicide would you choose?". Over 1600 adolescents have already responded. Tablets were the most popular (28.4 percent), then a leap from the roof (18.4 percent), the third and fourth place divide ways to "shoot" and "slit the wrists" (16 and 15.4 percent). These sites are pushing teenagers to the last line, and the detailed stories of suicides, cause the desire to imitate the other teenagers.

On the sites of Mail.ru, Vkontakte, Yandex.kz, Life Questions, YouTube adolescents recommend each other the best way to commit suicide, here you can find a partner for committing suicide, it is easy to find real instructions how to kill quickly and painlessly. For example, they tell how they die from rat poison or a large dose of aspirin tablets.

Unfortunately, at the request of suicide, Internet sites do not give out hot lines of emergency psychological help and tips to combat depression.

Moreover, a potential suicide will also be convinced that suicide is the only true solution to all problems: "Kill yourself, that's the only way," encourage the anonymous resource creators, and the same anonymous visitors take and voluntarily give up their lives.

Sites give visitors the opportunity to group together (newsgroup), where news and the like are published and discussed, and technically everything is implemented on the basis of Google, and there is also a chat.

In addition, there are links to funeral advice and death calculators, with which you can calculate how one way or another to part with life painless and effective.

There is no pity for people who write about thoughts of suicide - they are sent to hell, they advise how best to die. We found out that more than four million sites are devoted to suicide and are in the public domain in any social network. For adolescents with a fragile psyche, this information, in our opinion, can cause interest in the theme of death, which leads to unconscious acts.

Among adolescents aged 16 years and older, alcohol and substance abuse increase the risk of suicide during difficult life circumstances. Mood disturbance and anxiety, runaways from the home and a sense of hopelessness also increase the risk of suicide attempts. Suicide attempts are also often associated with experienced humiliation, such as failure at school or at work, or interpersonal conflict with a romantic partner. With the diagnosis of "personality disorder", there are 10 times more suicides than without such a diagnosis, and about 80% of committed suicide adolescents could be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress or symptoms of violence and aggression.

A powerful factor affecting the young person is the system of his social ties, primarily the family. At the same time, it is for teenagers and young people that relations with peers (friendship ties, first love, etc.) become increasingly important. The specificity of adolescence is increased sensitivity, coinciding with a period of uncertainty and entry into adulthood. Often this contributes to the fact that in a crisis situation, a young person can choose voluntary withdrawal from life as the most "easy" way to resolve it. In addition, detailed coverage of teenage suicides in the media, with which we are currently dealing, usually causes an "infection effect" ("Werther effect"), which generates a new wave of suicides in the appropriate age or social group.

The problem of adolescent and youth suicide is complex and requires a polyprofessional approach involving various agencies. At the same time, since most of the life of modern adolescents and young people is connected with educational institutions, it is the education system that can become a real

platform for work on early detection and prevention of suicidal behavior of students. The solution of these problems can be substantially advanced through the activities of general education and higher educational institutions.

Currently, the media play a huge role, having a significant impact on people's attitudes, beliefs and behavior. One of the many factors that can push a susceptible person to suicide may be illiterate coverage of suicide in the press. On the contrary, timely unveiled alarming signs of suicidal behavior can help the public to understand the markers of suicidal behavior, dispel suicide myths, and at the same time give hope to those who are potentially suicidal and need to rethink the alternatives that lie ahead. The information and educational direction of prevention of suicidal behavior should provide for explanatory work among media representatives covering tragic events (adolescent and youth suicides), with the aim of adopting internal ethical norms aimed at preventing unnecessarily detailed coverage of details of suicide in information messages that cause unhealthy interest in adolescents and leading to a risk of increasing the number of suicides among minors.

In addition, it is necessary to conduct a separate work related to counteracting the propaganda of children, teenage and youth suicides in the Internet environment. Such work could be facilitated by the creation and promotion of an Internet portal for crisis psychological counseling for adolescents and youth ("Anti-Crisis Internet Portal", aimed at preventing suicidal intentions among youth), whose goal would be to provide comprehensive psychological, educational and information support in crisis Situations for adolescents, youth, parents, educators. As part of the anti-crisis portal will be possible to implement a set of social advertising activities aimed at preventing suicidal behavior among minors, informing about the activities of emergency psychological services, debunking the myth of "romance and heroization" of avoiding difficult situations by suicide.

The next direction of preventing suicidal behavior in the education system is connected

with the implementation of the directions of social assistance to the family in a crisis situation, including the organization of a system of preventing suicidal behavior through working with the social environment of adolescents, youth from families in socially dangerous situations, at the request of educational institutions, Commissions on the affairs of minors and the protection of their rights, etc. Such a work could be carried out by the structural units of social support and help in urban (regional) centers for psychological and pedagogical, medical and social support (Center for diagnosis and correction). At the same time, it is necessary to create state units (for example, rehabilitation centers (based on year-round children's health camps), specializing in providing psychological, medical and social assistance to minors and young people in a difficult life situation (including those prone to suicidal behavior). The main activities of such units may be:

- development of profile shifts for psychological, medical and social support for certain categories of minors, as well as children who survived the psychotraumatic situations;
- rehabilitation of children and adolescents who survived the traumatic situations;
- the accompaniment of children and adolescents whose vital activity is objectively violated in the result of the circumstances and who cannot overcome these circumstances on their own or with the help of the family;
- prevention of deviant and suicidal behavior of adolescents and young people.

The problem of suicidal behavior requires all educators to understand the essence of this phenomenon, the ability to timely recognize the signs of suicidal intentions, close cooperation with psychiatrists (the offices of social and psychological assistance in crisis situations), the organization of preventive work, including the education of children, adolescents and youth to overcome difficult life situations. Prevention of

a healthy lifestyle, the development of the personality of each child, the formation of positive values of life, the preservation and development of a psychologically healthy maturing personality are the priority tasks in the prevention of suicidal behavior of children, adolescents, and young people.

So, from all of the above, we can conclude that the problem of the influence of the Internet on the suicidal thoughts of adolescents today is extremely acute. We found out that more than four million sites are devoted to suicide and are in the public domain in any social network.

### CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the content analysis of sites devoted to the subject of suicide revealed that on the Internet without any restrictions it is possible to freely find whole sites and groups, with detailed descriptions of the methods of suicide, to which the adolescents are participants. The content analysis of these sites in terms of meeting the criteria set for how these sites cover issues related to suicide showed that these sites influence the formation of suicidal thoughts in adolescents, pushing teenagers to the last point, and detailed stories of suicides, cause the desire to imitate other teenagers.

With regard to the reliability of information transmitted by mass media, the teens prefer television and the Internet, just as it can be said that almost all interviewed actively use all media channels and believe that the use of these channels has a negative impact on the psycho-emotional state of modern adolescents.

Thus, the hypothesis put forward by us has been confirmed. The Internet more than other types of media contributes to the formation of suicidal thoughts of adolescents; Its negative impact is determined, firstly, by the availability of thematic sites dedicated to the promotion of suicidal actions; Secondly, an inappropriate form of submission of material presented on the sites for the prevention of suicidal behavior.

Summarizing the above, it can be concluded that today the worldwide concern is the fact of the impact of modern media on adolescents. Today this impact is largely negative. The media have lost their once important functions of education, the formation



of the personality of adolescents, enlightenment. Prevention of suicidal thoughts among adolescents is a very complex but manageable complex task, the solution of which is possible with the interaction of various structures of society (government agencies, the social sector, educational institutions, law enforcement, health, religious organizations, the media).

The nature of media coverage of the suicide problem and specific cases of suicidal acts is essential. Based on the results of the study, we propose a number of recommendations on the specifics of media coverage of information on suicide cases: it is necessary to avoid placing reports on suicide on the front page of the publication and try to limit the severity of information submission and its volume. Reports of suicide should be, if possible, brief.

Excessive emotionality in reporting on suicide, as well as a playful or disparaging tone is unacceptable. Reporting about suicide should perform a preventive and informational function, but not moralizing and evaluative. In order to avoid excessive identification, one should not use images (photographs) of the victim, his (her) relatives and the place of suicide. It is better to provide a balanced picture of the life of the deceased, describing problems along with successes and victories and stressing that suicide is a consequence of a complex of psychological and social problems, mental disorders, most often alcohol and drug abuse, many of which are treatable. Be sure to provide information about local resources of social, psychological, psychotherapeutic and psychiatric assistance, including psychological help telephones ("helplines").

Particular attention should be paid to the language, stylistics and terminology of reports of suicide. It is not desirable to use the terms "suicidal", "suicide" and "committed suicide". Instead of these terms, it is recommended to use the term "died due to suicide". It is not recommended to use the words "successfully completed the act", "failed to complete", "failed attempt at suicide (suicide)", etc. More preferable are the terms "death by suicide" and "suicide attempt that did not end in death".

Media specialists can and should contribute to the society's awareness of the problem of suicide and the formation of realistic, not distorted prejudices about suicide, and to promote the dissemination of educational information on depression, signs of suicidal risk, ways of psychological help and treatment of mental disorders, providing information about local resources for social, psychological, psychotherapeutic and psychiatric care.

Following the recommendations in the submission of material on suicides will help to minimize harm, without leading to a refusal to highlight the problem of suicides in general.

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