

Online supplement

Online supplement: ethical considerations

We found it important not to conduct or publish the study close in time to the actual suicide event (October 2010), in consideration for the relatives and participants in the conversation thread on the forum. The tragic suicide described in this paper received a great deal of attention in the media and brought on a heated debate about responsibility. Some news media in Sweden also published the name of the victim and interviewed relatives. As the case was very important from the perspective of the development and the spread of suicide communication on the internet, in 2013 (3 years after the event) we decided to conduct this study.

Posts on the Flashback forum may be regarded as being in the public domain; hence, consent from the anonymous participants was not considered as necessary.⁵² Also, the posts were collected 3 years after they were published, and the thread was closed for new posts after about 6 months. Thus, it would have been extremely difficult to reach the anonymous participants in the original thread. However, to further reduce the already low risk

for involuntary identification, all the usernames of the anonymous participants were removed from the manuscript submitted for publication.

The Flashback forum – which has no specific responsible publisher – is comparable to a public e-BBS (electronic bulletin board system) which, according to Swedish law, directs content responsibility to participants themselves, without specific ownership or copyright of the posts. Also, all content on the Flashback forum was licensed under Creative Commons 2.5, which allows free copy and distribution of the material in any medium or format.

As no sensitive personal data were collected (e.g. name, healthcare or criminal status), no biological samples were taken and no intervention took place, the study did not undergo any further ethical authorisation (in accordance with the Swedish Law of research ethics – Lag (2003:460) om etikprövning av forskning som avser människor).

⁵² Eysenbach G, Till JE. Ethical issues in qualitative research on Internet communities. *BMJ* 2001; **323**: 1103–5.