

INTRODUCTION

I'd like to start by thanking the committee for hearing my testimony today. My name is Martin Keary and I'm here to describe my experience with the site Sanctioned Suicide, a forum where suicide is both encouraged and supported. A site that gets millions of page views a month.

I first came into contact with Sanctioned Suicide when a 17 year old musician I knew used the forum to help him commit suicide.

When looking over the conversations that he had on the forum, a few things stood out to me.

First, he described how he had never spoken to a mental health professional about his feelings and that his parents had no idea about what he was thinking of doing. Despite this revelation, most users on the platform continued to encourage him and actively assist his research.

While looking through his posts, I discovered that he had announced his intention to place himself in front of a train, and sought advice because he was worried the effort might fail. One response to this, which is representative of the majority opinion, was:

“Your biggest consequence is going to be either permanent damage or hospitalisation. Both can be avoided with enough research and planning.”

This started a research thread where multiple other people participated: assessing different train models to figure out which would be most likely to kill you, rather than simply knock you aside. It was determined that the most successful approach would be for him to place his neck on the track as the train approached and make sure that the oncoming train did not have a front guard, which could potentially thwart his efforts.

This is exactly what he did.

His final post on the forum was what is called a 'goodbye thread', a common ceremony where the person committing suicide describes their final moments, receiving fairwells as well as morbid questions.

Later, after I posted an objection to the forum, I was contacted by numerous parents of other victims of the site. It was from speaking to them that I decided to publish a video about it to warn people of its dangers. I am thankful that this video was seen by millions of people. It's my understanding that this video has been shared with the committee recently.

OVERVIEW

I want to use the remainder of my time to quickly describe the most dangerous and toxic aspects of the Sanctioned Suicide forum.

The first and most obvious thing I noticed is the total lack of responsible content moderation.

Users can suggest explicit methods to other anonymous users with impunity. In fact, moderators encourage this by banning those who advise others to seek treatment.

PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy espoused by those who created the forum is very influential on its mainly young user base and it's not hard to see that it's intentionally crafted to undermine the efforts of mental health specialists.

- Mental health or emergency services user are told, are only interested in money and just want to lock you up. Don't speak to them.
- Parents, users are told, are not to be trusted. If you tell them what you are thinking, they'll just invalidate your feelings and call emergency services to get you locked up.
- The most commonly stated argument on the platform is that only suicidal people can understand other suicidal people. Those who are successful, those who won the game of life don't understand. They're anti-suicide for selfish reasons. They just want to make themselves feel better. They can't be trusted.

MARKET PLACE

Sanctioned Suicide also operates as a market place where those looking to purchase the means to end their lives (usually a type of poison) can find links to sellers who provide it. I verified this last year, when I found details on the forum leading me to a seller named Kenneth Law, who sold me a substance called Sodium Nitrite which, when dissolved in water and ingested in sufficient quantity, prevents blood cells from transferring oxygen and kills you. During this time, I was in touch with a journalist at the Times of London, who was investigating Kenneth Law. His subsequent article led to Kenneth's arrest. Kenneth Law is now facing 14 counts of first degree murder in Ontario, Canada. He is alleged to be linked to over 100 deaths world wide, with victims ranging from 16 - 36 years old. Kenneth did not ask for my age when he sold me Sodium Nitrite. There are numerous more sellers like this who find customers on the Sanctioned Suicide forum.

BARRIER TO ENTRY

Worst of all, registration and age verification is not required. The site has no barriers in place that would prevent anyone from viewing the contents of the forum. Including detailed instructions on every conceivable method of killing yourself.

From speaking to multiple suicide prevention charities and mental health specialists, I've come to understand the importance of a concept known as a mental health crisis. This is a period of time when the victim loses the capacity to think about the future and falls into a pit of intense mental pain. It's exactly at this moment when a patient must be carefully cared for and there has been a lot of research showing that the likelihood of suicide is drastically reduced once a mental health crisis episode has passed.

Sanctioned Suicide has no systems in place that would enable users to recognise a mental health crisis, which means that they regularly distribute appalling advice to people at the worst possible moment.

Moreover, those with learning disabilities or conditions such as Schizophrenia - who may be unable to critically assess advice given to them - also pass completely unnoticed and are treated the same as everyone else. It is a disaster.

Lastly, it's worth mentioning that the founders of the site also run the most successful Incel forum on the web. This forum is an anti-women site, also rife with racism, homophobia, conspiracy theories and anti semitism. It is, according to a report by the Centre for Countering Digital Hate, also linked to at least one mass shooting also. These are the people advising our children to kill themselves..

Again I'd like to thank the committee for taking the time to listen to my testimony on this subject.