



Emerging Research Results

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Preliminary Results from the Men's Self-Injurious Behaviour Study

KEY WORDS: *offender suicide; non-suicidal self-injury; mental health*

Why we're doing this study

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) is deliberate bodily harm or disfigurement without suicidal intent and for purposes not socially sanctioned, such as cutting, head banging, and ligature use. NSSI and suicide attempts threaten the safety and well-being of offenders and staff, yet information is lacking on these behaviours within CSC. A study was undertaken to improve the understanding of NSSI and suicide attempts in male offenders in order to inform treatment, prevention, and management of these behaviours in CSC.

What we're doing

Men were recruited from 11 medium and maximum security federal correctional institutions in Canada. Men with a known history of NSSI were selected for recruitment, along with a matched comparison group of men without this history. Participants ($n = 199$) completed a semi-structured interview and a series of questionnaires. The offenders' files were also reviewed. The study was designed to assess NSSI and related factors, such as history of abuse, mental health, impulsivity, and aggression. Men with and without a history of NSSI were compared, and features of NSSI were explored in-depth.

What we've found so far

Men with a history of NSSI ($n = 104$) scored significantly higher on hostility, impulsivity, and aggression compared to those who did not have a history of NSSI ($n = 95$). These men were also more likely to meet the criteria for depression, substance abuse, panic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, antisocial personality disorder, and borderline personality disorder.

Additionally, men with a history of NSSI were more likely to use self-distraction and venting as methods of coping, which may suggest that NSSI is used as a maladaptive coping strategy. Men with a history of

NSSI were also more likely to have experienced childhood sexual, emotional, and physical abuse.

No significant differences were found with respect to marital status or ethnicity, suggesting that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders are equally likely to engage in NSSI.

Approximately 65% of all study participants had at least one incident of NSSI or a suicide attempt in their past. About 35% of the participants had a history of both NSSI and suicide attempts. While suicide attempts and NSSI were correlated, these behaviours were clearly distinct

Of the men who had a history of NSSI, 38% first initiated the behaviour in the community and 41% indicated that their first incident of NSSI was in a CSC institution. The remaining participants first self-injured in a non-CSC institution, such as a psychiatric or provincial correctional institution.

What it means

Men who have engaged in NSSI differ from those who have not self-injured in a number of important ways. Men who self-injure have more complex mental health issues that should be considered in efforts to treat and prevent this behaviour. More research into the motivations for self-injuring among federally sentenced men is required. This research is ongoing at the Research Branch.

Prepared by: Jenelle Power & Amelia Usher

Contact

Research Branch
(613) 996-3287

research@csc-scc.gc.ca

