



Research at a glance

A Replication Study of Self-Injury Incidents in CSC Institutions Over a Thirty-Month Period

KEY WORDS: *self-injurious behaviour, offender mental health, offender suicide*

Why we did this study

Self-injurious behaviour (SIB) can be defined as any type of direct bodily harm or disfigurement that is deliberately inflicted on oneself that is not considered to be socially acceptable. SIB poses serious challenges for the safety of offenders and staff in correctional facilities, and therefore information regarding this behaviour is required to aid in its prevention, management, and treatment. A previous study by Gordon (2010) examined the SIB incidents between April 1st, 2006 and September 20th, 2008. In the present study, we replicated the methodology used in Gordon's study to examine the trends in the subsequent 30-month period.

What we did

We reviewed the self-injury incidents reported from October 1st, 2008 to March 31st, 2011 in the Offender Management System, a national database that contains information on all federal offenders and/or in the Situation Reports, daily reports produced to inform senior managers of significant incidents in CSC.

What we found

In total, 639 offenders were involved in 2,102 incidents of SIB (including suicide attempts and threats to self-injury) over this time period. Types of incidents included cutting, ligature use, object insertion, head banging, banging a part of the body other than the head, wound reopening, overdose, and swallowing an object (excluding food and drugs). When accounting for population change, number of unique offenders involved in self-injury increased by 7% over the study period and the number of incidents rose 32%, but was relatively stable for the last 18 months. This increase is explained largely by changes in the rate of self-injury among women offenders. The number of deaths attributable to SIB decreased from 26 to 22.

A small group of women (14%) who engaged in repeated self-injury during the study period accounted for the majority of incidents (79%). Therefore, increases in the rates of SIB among women are largely influenced by a small number of women who engage in SIB frequently. Among the men, 4% engaged in 10 or more incident of SIB, accounting for about 30% of the men's incidents. Women were more likely to head bang and have their SIB discovered by a staff member while men were more likely to cut, threaten to self-injure, and report their injury themselves.

What it means

The upward trend in SIB found by Gordon (2010) continued for an additional year and then plateaued for the final 18 months of the study, suggesting that the increase may have been due to increases in reporting and more careful monitoring rather than true increases. The number of incidents remains high, however, necessitating additional efforts on interventions. Focusing efforts on offenders with a high frequency of SIB could reduce the number of incidents, while a prevention initiative could reduce the number of offenders engaging in SIB.

For more information

Power, J., Gordon, A., Sapers, J., & Beaudette, J. (2012). *A replication study of self-injury incidents in CSC institutions over a thirty-month period*. Research Report, R293. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

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