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Alarming' rise in self-harm in young people

Despite an increase in reports of self-harm across the population, only half are receiving mental health treatment.

Rates of [self-harm](#) increased from 2% to 6% of the population between 2000 and 2014, according to new research published in [The Lancet Psychiatry](#). Despite this, there was no increase in access to mental health treatment and support. About 50% of people who self-harmed did not get help.

The research covered non-suicidal self-harm (NSSH), a type of self-inflicted harm without suicidal intent. There are concerns about the long-term impact of NSSH especially if adopted as a coping strategy over a long period of time. However, the study did not record peoples' reasons for self-harm.

Despite an overall increase in all age groups and sexes, young people aged 16-24, particularly girls and women, saw the highest rates of self-harm. In 2014 19.7% of 16- to 24-year-old girls reported NSSH compared with 6.5% in 2000. Women and girls in the overall population continue to be more at risk of self-harm, although rates tripled in both male and female populations between 2000 and 2014, from 1.4% to 4% in men and boys, and from 2.1% to 6.8% in women and girls.

The study is particularly interesting as previous research has used information from health services rather than the general population which can be misleading as a majority of people engaging in NSSH do not receive medical treatment.

Lead author of the study, Sally McManus from the [National Centre for Social Research](#), highlighted a need to "help people, especially young people, learn more appropriate and effective ways of dealing with emotional stress". She encouraged better access and availability of services "so that health, education and social care professionals can discuss the subject with them and support better emotional health".

Emma Thomas, chief executive of child and adolescent mental health charity [YoungMinds](#), echoed her message, calling the results of the study "alarming". She says it's important to understand the reasons behind using unhealthy coping strategies such as self-harm.

"The reasons behind self-harm can be complex, but we know from our research that young people today face a wide range of pressures. At the moment, it's far too difficult for children and young people to get mental health support before they reach crisis point. The government has promised extra investment, which must make a real difference to front-line services - but we also need to see action so young people can get early support in their communities."

This study was published in [The Lancet Psychiatry](#).

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