

Exploring Self-Harm in the Digital Age: Young People's Perspectives on Social Media

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Abstract

This study examines young people's perceptions of the young people's of non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) on social media. To achieve this, a survey was conducted with nearly 1,000 young adults aged between 18 and 30 years, yielding the following key findings. Most research highlights a growing prevalence of non-suicidal self-injury among young people's (López & Sánchez, 2023; Rascón, 2024; Wester et al., 2018; Xiao et al., 2022). Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) refers to intentional and direct harm inflicted on one's body without the purpose of ending one's life. The most common manifestation of this behavior is self-inflicted cutting (Nock, 2010). Research indicates that NSSI often serves as a coping mechanism for managing emotional and affective distress. It is used to regulate emotions, providing a form of temporary relief from overwhelming feelings (Gómez-Guadix, M., et al., 2020; Gómez Sánchez, S., et al., 2019). However, this behavior frequently becomes a recurring pattern, intensifying over time, and is challenging to overcome without professional intervention (Sipos et al., 2019). Evidence also suggests that NSSI is often associated with other mental health conditions, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and eating disorders (Calvete et al., 2015).

The methodology used is based on an online survey conducted via Microsoft Forms, with a maximum duration of 10 minutes. This survey was targeted at young people aged between 18 and 30 years. The main selection criterion for participants was age, restricted to individuals over 18 years old.

The 99% of respondents reported knowing what self-injury entails, and 78% indicated that they know someone who has self-harmed, with cases being more prevalent among females than males. Notably, the majority of the cases mentioned involve young people aged between 14 and 17 years.

Respondents stated that their knowledge about self-injury primarily comes from friends or family members, although 31% attributed it to social media. Additionally, 11% of participants have directly accessed content related to self-injury on these platforms, and 20% reported familiarity with the codes created by digital communities around this behavior. The most frequently mentioned social media platforms in this context are X (31%), TikTok (28%), and Instagram (26%). Finally, 96% of respondents believe that legal regulation and oversight of these topics are necessary.

Keywords

Self-injury (NSSI), Self-harm (NSSI), perceptions, social media, young people's, X, TikTok.