

Charlotte Swarna Pearson

L2

LSU Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, LA

Rahn Bailey, MD

LSUHSC, Department of Psychiatry

“Risk Factors for Non-Suicidal Self Injury Among Incarcerated Juveniles: A Meta-Analysis”

Background: Non-suicidal self injury (NSSI) is defined as the intentional, direct destruction of one’s own body tissue without suicidal intent. Adolescents display the highest rate of NSSI, and NSSI is more prevalent in prisons than in the general population. NSSI is one of the greatest predictors for future suicidal behavior. Therefore, understanding NSSI risk factors among vulnerable groups such as incarcerated adolescents is important in preventing future suicidality. The current meta-analysis seeks to identify unique risk factors for NSSI among incarcerated juveniles.

Methods: A systematic review was conducted for publications between 1980 and 2022 using four electronic databases (PsycINFO, Criminal Justice Abstracts, Embase, and PubMed) for articles related to NSSI in incarcerated juveniles. Boolean search terms included “NSSI or non-suicidal self injury or non suicidal self harm” and “incarc* or prison* and “Adole* or juvenile” or detain*.” Eligibility for article inclusion were participants detained or recently released for criminal offense, mean age < 20, specific report on NSSI, and English language publication. 22 peer reviewed articles and 1 dissertation were included. Data for extraction included forms of NSSI, sample characteristics, measures/assessments used, and risk factors identified for NSSI.

Results: 7,668 juveniles from ten countries were represented in this systematic review. The overall prevalence rate of NSSI was found to be 29%. Six studies had male-only samples and two had female-only samples. While most studies were of mixed gender (N=14), the sample composition for these studies were largely male. Sociodemographic factors related to increased NSSI including being a gender/sexual minority (GSM), female gender, younger age, and identifying as White. Exposure to self-harm from friends and more negative romantic relationship events were associated with higher rates of NSSI. Family history of substance abuse, mental illness, or general history of physical and sexual abuse history all increased risk for NSSI. Co-morbid psychiatric disorders and mood disorders/symptoms (depression and anxiety) were also associated with elevated risk.

Conclusions: Meta-analysis indicated that female gender, younger age, White race, GSM, self-harm exposure, physical/sexual abuse, familial substance abuse and mental illness, depression and anxiety were all risk factors for NSSI among incarcerated adolescents. The definition and assessment of NSSI varied across papers, representing a limitation to any unanimous conclusions. Criminal detention represents a stressful environment that can exacerbate risk factors for NSSI and suicide. Clinicians may address this by assessing incarcerated adolescents at entry and routinely for risk factors of self-harm and NSSI.