

Differences in the Extent and Function of Self-Harm With Regard To the Sexual Orientation of Youths

Slavka Demuthova¹, Andrej Demuth²

¹University of. Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia

²Full Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia

Abstract

During adolescence, the formation of an individual's identity and other developmental tasks are a challenge and frequently put a great deal of mental pressure on a young person. The processes and strategies they select to cope with these burdens may not always be adaptive; during their youth, a young person often reacts with various forms of inappropriate behaviour. One very common maladaptive coping strategy, whose prevalence in the youth population continues to grow, is self-harm. The process of going through their youthful years may be made even more challenging if the individual encounters difficulties in the exploration of their own identity or in how they present it to others. In this context, the non-heterosexually oriented population of youths are particularly at risk. The study focuses on the issue of self-harm in the context of the sexual orientation of a youth – based on a sample of 265 participants aged between 15 and 25 (AM = 19.371). It examines the extent and function of self-harming behaviour and links it to sexual orientation (heterosexual or non-heterosexual). The results showed a statistically significantly higher rate of self-harm (sig. < 0.001) in those youths who are non-heterosexually oriented. Certain specific functions of self-harm (the prevention of dissociation and suicide) were found to dominate within this group which indicates a possible link to other clinical symptoms within self-harm.

Keywords: adolescence, maladaptive coping, self-mutilation, sexual orientation