

A double-edged sword: Strengths and weaknesses of research on Non- Suicidal Self-Injury

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Abstract

Research on Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) has been limited because of the variability in defining self-injurious behavior (Ammerman et al., 2021; Hooley et al., 2020; Muehlenkamp et al., 2017; Zetterqvist, 2015), resulting in inconsistencies across studies (Favazza, 2012; Shahwan et al., 2020). The present scoping review examines recent research on NSSI and proposes changes to the assessment methods. Research studies published from 2013 through 2023 were examined in terms of participants, assessment tools, and the frequency, severity, and types of NSSI behaviors reported by the participants. In some studies, participants included psychiatric patients who were assessed with a combination of structured interviews and self-report questionnaires. However, it was much more common to find research studies that relied solely on questionnaires administered to college students, high school students, or anonymous respondents who answered questions to an online survey. Furthermore, the assessment of NSSI was often limited to self-reported acts. Most studies failed to report the details needed to examine the frequency, severity, and specific type of self-injury reported by their participants. Future research should reduce the reliance on samples of convenience whereby the most common forms of NSSI are limited to acts that result only in minor injury or transient discomfort. Further, research will be improved through the use of standardized measurement and consistent reporting of the type, frequency, and severity of NSSI acts. More detailed research on NSSI could provide valuable insights into the mindset, situational triggers, and destructive actions displayed during an episode of NSSI.

Keywords: injury; assessment; research; methodology; psychopathology