

The Relationship Between Self-Harm and Moral Emotions

¹Andrej Démuth, and ²Slávka Démuthová

¹ Comenius University Bratislava, Slovakia

² University of Ss Cyril and Methodius, Trnava, Slovakia

ABSTRACT

The relationship between self-harm and moral emotions, such as guilt, shame, and disgust, is deeply interconnected. Self-harm is frequently seen in the context of mental health disorders like depression and borderline personality disorder, often exacerbated by strong moral emotions. Guilt can lead individuals to self-harm as a form of self-punishment for perceived wrongdoings, while shame fosters self-loathing and a belief in one's inherent unworthiness. Disgust, particularly related to body image, can drive self-harm as a coping mechanism. Perfectionism can further contribute when individuals fail to meet unrealistic moral standards, intensifying feelings of guilt and shame. The presented study focuses on examining the relationship between moral emotions and self-harm and provides results on the most common sources of self-harm in connection with moral emotions. Self-harm thus appears to be a consequence of excessive moral sensitivity to the discrepancy between one's own performance and behavior, as well as an inappropriate coping strategy that can be (and often is) both logically and neurobiologically cyclical, leading to addiction. The resulting cycle of negative emotions sustains self-harm, while potential therapeutic interventions aim to break this cycle by addressing the underlying emotional dynamics and attempting to process moral emotions in a healthier (non-self-harming) way.

Keywords: self-injury, emotion, guilt, shame, perfectionism

This research **work was supported** by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract No. APVV-23-0181