SURVEY FINDS WORRYING NUMBER OF YOUNG PEOPLE SELF-HARM

New survey findings suggest that self-harm among adolescents, especially young girls, is an increasing problem. Nerys Hairon finds out more about this behaviour.

The shocking statistic that around one-third of young girls have self-harmed highlights the importance of vigilance for signs of this behaviour and risk factors in patients.

A new survey has revealed that 32% of females aged 11–19 in the UK have tried to harm themselves. The survey, commissioned by mental healthcare specialist provider Affinity Healthcare, found a total of 22% of young people aged 11–19 admitted to self-harm (Affinity Healthcare, 2008).

As the survey results indicate that self-harm is becoming an increasing problem, it is vital that both practice nurses in primary care and those in acute care are aware of the issue and those most at risk. They also need to know signs that a person may be self-harming and management strategies.

KEY FINDINGS

The survey, carried out by Q Research in April this year, questioned 818 young people aged 11–19 across the UK (Affinity Healthcare, 2008). It found that 56% of all respondents admitted to knowing someone who had self-harmed. Of those who had self-harmed, 73% admitted to cutting, 48% to punching themselves, 14% to burning and 10% to self-poisoning.

The reasons for this behaviour were found to be wide-ranging and complex. Of those who admitted to self-harm, 43% said they had done so because they were depressed, 17% because they were angry, 10% as a result of relationship problems and 10% because they were stressed.

Following the results, Affinity Healthcare warns that self-harm among young people is becoming an increasing problem.

WHAT IS SELF-HARM?

The National Children’s Bureau’s (NCB) Young People and Self-harm website (2008) states self-harm can take many forms, including:

- Cutting;
- Taking overdoses of tablets or medicines;
- Punching;
- Throwing one’s body against something;
- Pulling out hair or eyelashes;
- Scratching, picking or tearing at the skin, causing sores and scarring;
- Burning;
- Inhaling or sniffing harmful substances.

Mind (2008) explains that self-harm may also take less obvious forms, such as taking unnecessary risks, staying in an abusive relationship, an addiction to alcohol or drugs, or a person failing to look after their own emotional or physical needs.

The term self-harm (or deliberate self-harm) is preferred to ‘attempted suicide’ or ‘parasuicide’, because the various reasons for the behaviour include several non-suicidal intentions (Hawton and James, 2005). These researchers explained that although young people who self-harm may claim they want to die, the motivation for many has more to do with expressing distress and escaping from difficult situations. Even when death is the outcome, this may not have been the person’s intention.

INCIDENCE AND RISK FACTORS

The NCB (2008) says it is difficult to determine the exact prevalence of self-harm among young people due to the secrecy that often surrounds this behaviour. In addition, there is no standard definition used in research, and there are no national statistics at present.

The best evidence available suggests that self-harm is most common in children over the age of 11 and increases in frequency with age. It is rare in very young children,
Although there is evidence of children as young as five trying to harm themselves (NCB, 2008), Hawton and James (2005) reported that 7–14% of adolescents will self-harm at some point in their lives, and 20–45% of older adolescents say they have had suicidal thoughts at some time.

Self-harm is more common among girls and young women than among boys and young men. Research suggests that, among young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people over 13, around three times as many females compared with males harm themselves (NCB, 2008). However, Mind (2008) points out the percentage of young people o