



SHORT COMMUNICATION

Psychological pain and self-harming behaviours in an adulthood community sample: An exploratory study



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Abstract This study evaluated the contribution of psychological pain to self-harming behaviours, controlling for several co-variables. A convenience sample of 207 U.S. residents provided socio-demographic and clinical information and responded to the Psychache Scale. Logistic regression analysis demonstrated that when controlling for the significant co-variables of drug use and having a psychiatric diagnosis, psychological pain provided a significant contribution in predicting self-harming behaviours. Psychological pain also correlated with the frequency of self-harming behaviours, controlling for significant co-variables. We conclude that, when clinicians collect life history and assess relevant risk factors for self-harming behaviours, it is also important to assess psychological pain.

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One of the most compelling psychological models of suicide is that of Shneidman,¹ who stated that psychological pain is a necessary condition for the occurrence of suicidal behaviour. Shneidman¹ used the term psychache to designate an extreme and intolerable form of psychological pain that is seen as the cause of suicide, with all other factors associating with suicide only through this psychological pain.

Two recent meta-analyses^{2,3} have confirmed that psychological pain is a core factor for suicidal behaviours to occur.

Despite documented contributions of psychological pain for suicidal ideation and behaviours, such as suicide attempts, a paucity of evidence exists for its relationships with self-harming behaviours. Self-harming refers to intentional self-poisoning or self-injury, irrespective of the motive or the extent of suicidal intent.⁴ Contrarily to suicidal attempts, the focus is on deliberating causing self harm, not on taking one's own life. However, self-harming has been associated with substantial risk of suicide in adulthood,^{5,6} moderating the relationship between suicide ideation and suicide attempts in young adults.⁷ Fortune et al.,⁸ using a

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