

Self-Mutilation among Finnish Adolescents - A Multifaceted Phenomenon

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 - Definition and characteristics of self-mutilation, and factors associated with it
 - Description of an adolescent who self-mutilates
- Conclusions

Background

- Self-mutilation is an old, maybe ancient phenomenon.
- The first scientific article on self-mutilation, published in 1935 by Karl Menninger, focused on its significance.

Background

- Prevalence varies 2-14%.
- In Finland, the lifetime prevalence of self-mutilation has recently been reported to be 11.5%, and in addition, self-mutilation is more prevalent among girls than boys (Laukkanen et al. 2009).
- Self-mutilation is most prevalent among adolescents under 18 years of age (Hawton et al. 2002).

Background

- However, despite the large number of studies on self-harm, including self-mutilation, or further modelling of it (Ross & Heat 2003, Messer & Fremouw 2008), or definitions of self-mutilation, it is still a difficult phenomenon to understand.
- In most study reports self-mutilation has not been precisely conceptualised.

Background

Definitions

- According to Favazza (1989): “pathological self-mutilation is a direct destruction or alteration of body tissue without conscious intent to die”
- Hicks and Hinck (2008): “Self-mutilation is the intentional act of tissue destruction with the purpose of shifting overwhelming emotional pain to a more acceptable physical pain”

Background

- As Clarke and Whittaker (1998) suggested, self-mutilation should be seen and known as a culturally defined phenomenon.
- In Finland, factual knowledge of self-mutilation as a phenomenon has been restricted among citizens and also among professionals because studies focused on self-mutilation are rare.
- Thus, the importance of research focused on self-mutilation as a phenomenon in a culture where it exists, as in this case in Finland, is indisputable.

Aim

- To define self-mutilation as a phenomenon among Finnish adolescents from the viewpoint of adolescents, their parents and nurses.

Methods

- Descriptions of self-mutilation as a phenomenon were collected during the years 2002-2005 from adolescents (n = 70), parents (n = 4) and nurses (n = 10) via written descriptions as well as via individual and focus group interviews.
- The interviews were transcribed verbatim and combined with the written descriptions.
- Adolescents', parents' and nurses' descriptions were separately analyzed using inductive content analysis.
- Metasynthesis was used in combining the findings to gain a new understanding of the phenomenon.

Findings

- Definition and characteristics of self-mutilation, and factors associated with it
- Description of an adolescent who self-mutilates

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SELF-MUTILATION

- Individual adolescent level**
- Puberty
 - Internal or experiential factors and changes
 - External factors and changes
 - Gender
- Community level: especially in the family community**
- Possible difference in upbringing of self-mutilating adolescent
 - The level of competence of parenting
 - Problems in the family
- Society level**
- Violence
 - Lack of information on self-mutilation as a phenomenon
 - Requirement for adolescents to appear older than they are

PURPOSES OF SELF-MUTILATION

Relating to oneself

- Self-help
- Punishing oneself
- Having blips in everyday life
- Practicing Satan worship
- Without a conscious purpose

Relating to others

- A cry for help
- Being protective towards the mother
- Punishing or protesting by melodramatic behaviour against mother

The profile of self-mutilation is blackish

DEFINITION

"Self-mutilation is all kinds of deliberate destructive acts towards one's own skin such as scratching, burning, cutting or self-injuring, alone or together with someone, on all other parts of one's body excluding the head and back, with any tool that happens to be available and that makes a mark or a bleeding wound or wounds"

The crossing of a certain line

Compulsive (III, V)

Confusing

A matter requiring intervention

Undiscussed – importance of discussing

Abnormal - might be a part of youth culture

Unknown – familiar

Taboo subject

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-MUTILATION

An old phenomenon

Contagious

Unshameful

A typical phenomenon among adolescents

Difficult to perceive

Interrelation with suicide; a possibility to commit suicide or a totally unrelated act

Action happens in public – secretly

A trendy disease - far from trendy

SEQUELS OF SELF-MUTILATION

Sequels at the individual level for the adolescent

- Sequels at the emotional level
- Meanings related to blood and to pain
- Concrete physical permanent results such as scars
- Suicide attempts

Sequels at the community level

- Concrete and emotional reactions
- Unresponsiveness
- Intervening in self-mutilation
- Obliviousness to self-mutilation as a phenomenon

Definition of self-mutilation and factors associated with it

DEFINITION OF SELF-MUTILATION

- "Self-mutilation is all kinds of deliberate destructive acts towards one's own skin such as scratching, burning, cutting or self-injuring, alone or together with someone, on all other parts of one's body excluding the head and back, with any tool that happens to be available and that makes a mark or a bleeding wound or wounds"

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-MUTILATION

- contagious
- unshameful
- a typical phenomenon among adolescents
- difficult to perceive
- a taboo subject
- a matter requiring intervention
- compulsive
- confusing

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PHENOMENON OF SELF-MUTILATION

- the profile of self-mutilation is blackish
- the crossing of a certain line
- unknown – familiar
- undiscussed – importance of discussing
- an action that happens publicly – secretly
- a trendy disease – far from trendy
- abnormal – might be a part of youth culture
- interrelated with suicide: the possibility to commit suicide or a totally unrelated act

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SELF-MUTILATION

Individual adolescent level

- Puberty
- Internal or experiential factors and changes
- External factors and changes
- Gender

Community level: especially in the family community

- Possible difference in upbringing of self-mutilating adolescent
- The level of competence of parenting
- Problems in the family

Society level

- Violence
- Lack of information on self-mutilation as a phenomenon
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Relating to oneself

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Relating to others

- A cry for help
- Being protective towards the mother
- Punishing or protesting by melodramatic behaviour against mother
- Blood vengeance

SEQUELS OF SELF-MUTILATION

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Sequels at the community level

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- Intervening in self-mutilation
- Obliviousness to self-mutilation as a phenomenon

Description of an adolescent who self-mutilates

- She is **externally** seen as feeling great, taking care of others, conscientious and mistreated.
- **Internally** she has a low self-esteem, she feels lonely, she is sensitive and ashamed of self-mutilation.

Conclusions

- Self-mutilation has multiple meanings and is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be unambiguously described.
- This means that information on it is needed among the general public, and education focused on self-mutilation is additionally needed for social and healthcare personnel.
- This study can be seen as a foundation for deeper research on self-mutilation.
- Furthermore, more research is needed, for example, on the viewpoint of siblings.

Thank You!