Deliberate self-harm in Swedish university students – onset and relationships with anxiety and mindfulness

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Deliberate self-harm (DSH) can be defined as intentional self-induced harming of one’s own body resulting in relevant tissue damage (Fyer et al., 2006).

Such behaviors have received much interest in research and in literature-reviews during recent years (Heath et al., 2008).

DSH typically has its onset in early adolescence and is strongly correlated with psychiatric symptoms, but occurs over many different disorders, as well as in non-clinical samples (Hawton et al., 2008; Hawton et al., 2010).

DSH is generally viewed as a dysfunctional coping mechanism or as a non-adaptive strategy to regulate tension and other negative emotions used by some people (Kovar, 2007).

Regrettably, the research in this field has been obstructed by methodological shortcomings, such as the lack of a uniform definition of DSH and reliable instruments to measure such behaviors. One attempt to amend these methodological problems has been the development of the Deliberate Self-Harm Inventory (DSHI; Gratz, 2001).

To date no Swedish data on the prevalence of DSH in university students has been collected for this work: Patrik Kapeller, Tommy Bank, Micaela García and Jonas Bjärehed.

Therefore, this study was planned in two steps:

First, a shortened Swedish version of the Deliberate Self-Harm Inventory (DSHI-s) (Bjärehed & Lund, 2008) was used in a sample of university students. This version of the instrument screened for the life-time prevalence of a broad range of different forms of DSH and was thus used to establish if these behaviors indeed were present in university students.

Second, a further shortened version of the instrument called the Deliberate Self-Harm Inventory (DSHI-s; Bjärehed & Lund, 2008), that had previously been used with Swedish adolescents was administered to a second sample of university students. The reason for using the DSH-s was that a shorter instrument would be easier and quicker for participants to answer.

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