

Sensory processing, body awareness and self concept in adolescent girls with major mood disorders: A comparison of girls who self-injure with those who do not.

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Self-Mutilation (SM) is defined as any self-injurious act that is committed by a person with the intent of committing harm without suicidal intent. Self-mutilation is often seen in the form of skin cutting and burning, most frequently on the arms and frontal body. Investigations of the factors that contribute to this behavior are becoming more evident. However, little is understood about adolescents who self-injure with regard to body image, self-concept, and sensory processing. These are topics of particular interest to occupational therapists who embrace a holistic view of human beings. Body image, a component of self-concept, is related to how individuals see themselves, and how they think others perceive them. Sensory processing differences may occur in the form of under responsiveness as self-injurers report little awareness of pain from the injurious act and often a sense of relief from anxiety.

The purpose of this descriptive investigation is to examine sensory processing, body awareness, and self concept in adolescent girls diagnosed with mood disorders. Of the 40 participants with psychiatric diagnoses recruited for this study, one half are represented by girls who self-mutilate. A group of teenagers without mood disorders and who are not self-injuring provides a comparison control group. Four questionnaires that pertain to sensory processing, body image and self-concept serve as the assessment instruments. These include the Adolescent/Adult Sensory Profile (Dunn, 2002), Body Investment Scale (Orbach, 1998), Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, Second Edition (Piers & Herzberg, 2002), and Draw A Person: Screening Procedure for Emotional Disturbance (DAP:SPED) (Naglieri, McNeish, & Bardos, 1991).

Preliminary data analysis has revealed that a distorted body image is more prevalent in the participants with mood disorders as compared to the control group. Further analyses will reveal any differences in those girls who specifically self-injure. Occupational therapists are interested in the whole person, which includes mind, body and spirit. Because we are educated in matters of sensory processing and body image, our perspective on the issue of self-mutilation is unique and may offer avenues of intervention not previously explored.