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# Youth Scan

May 2008

From the National Youth Council

"Developing a Vibrant, Highly-Connected, and

Self-Sustaining Youth Sector, and Nurturing World-Ready Youth"

Bringing you snippets of youth trends and issues compiled from  
diverse sources such as news reports, journals and press releases,

Youth Scan aims to help you stay in touch with the constantly evolving youth scene.

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## **1. Big rise in self-harm among teenagers**

*Independent, September 06 2004*

## **2. Pain Relief**

*The Straits Times, March 14 2008*

## **3. Third of girls 'have self-harmed'**

*BBC News, April 13 2006*

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*NewScientist, April 14 2006*

## **5. Self-harmers to be given clean blades**

*Times Online, February 05 2006*

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## **1. Big rise in self-harm among teenagers**

*Kirby, Terry*

*Independent, September 06 2004*

The numbers of young people deliberately injuring themselves may be increasing dramatically and largely out of sight of the authorities, according to a report published today.

The National Inquiry into Self-Harm said that figures from helplines suggested a rapid increase to about 170,000 people a year. Of which 24,000 are teenagers The charity, Childline, said calls to counsellors from children worried about self-harm increased by 30 per cent in the year to March 2004 and were running at an average increase of 23 per cent a year over the past decade. About 70 per cent were aged between 12 and 15.

More than 90 per cent of callers were girls and about 12 per cent had deliberately hurt themselves for five years or more. Most admitted to cutting themselves with razor blades and glass. Others talked about deliberately bruising and burning themselves.

The inquiry, which has heard from 150 people with self-harm experience, said among children and teenagers, it usually stemmed from bereavement, an abusive parent, exam stress or bullying. Many young people who harmed themselves lacked confidence and were extremely sensitive, the study found.

(Source: Independent, Accessed on 16 May 2008

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-wellbeing/health-news/big-rise-in-selfharm-among-teenagers-551493.html>)

The full report, *Truth Hurts*, can be accessed at the following url:

<http://www.selfharmuk.org/docs/self%20harm%20report%20lowres.pdf>

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## **2. Pain Relief**

*Lisabel, Ting*

*The Straits Times, March 14 2008*

Youth face a host of pressures ranging from intense academic competition to relationship commitments. Suffocated by the demands that teenagers are unable to fulfill, pent up feelings or 'angst' may cause teenagers to turn to self-mutilation as a physical outlet for emotional pain.

As explained by Dr Daniel Fung, chief of the department of child and adolescent psychiatry at the Institute of Mental Health, the pain from self-mutilation will trigger the release of endorphins. These hormones will numb the pain and give the person something of a 'high'. The effect of endorphins can be similar to certain hard drugs like heroin, which makes cutting so addictive. Dr Fung also warns of the contagion effect – a teenager who is exposed to it more often is more likely to begin to explore such methods.

To grapple with the rising number of cases, the number of mental health care avenues available to youths has also correspondingly, increased. More hotlines are being set up, and there are counselors stationed in many schools to provide support and professional guidance. However not many youths seek help. Most do not see cutting as a problem; instead it is accepted as a legitimate method of stress relief.

(Source: AsiaOne, Accessed on 16 May 2008,

<http://www.asiaone.com/print/Health/News/Story/A1Story20080314-54451.html>)

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## **3. Third of girls 'have self-harmed'**

*BBC News, April 13 2006*

A third of UK girls aged 11 to 19 have tried to harm themselves, a survey for a mental healthcare provider suggests. The main reason given was feeling depressed (43%), with the results among boys being slightly lower at 22%. Other reasons given for self-harm include anger (17%); relationship problems (10%); and stress (10%).

Dr David Kingsley, consultant psychiatrist at Cheadle Royal Hospital run by Affinity Healthcare - a mental healthcare provider for the NHS who commissioned the research - said professionals felt it was an

increasing problem. He said parents and teachers should be vigilant for young people who were withdrawn, struggling emotionally or feeling low. "We need to ask ourselves what it is about modern living that is causing such stress for our youngsters."

Chief executive of mental health charity Sane, stated that cutting can be an "addictive and desperate way" of coping with the pressures of adolescence. "It is essential that the rising number of young people who self-harm are helped to stop before it develops into what may become a life long illness." Early treatment and counseling has to be made available immediately for the person.

(Source: *BBC News*, Accessed on 19 May 2008  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/7365192.stm>)

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#### **4. Goth subculture may protect vulnerable children**

*NewScientist*, April 14 2006

About half of teenage Goths have deliberately harmed themselves or attempted suicide, a new study suggests. But joining the modern subculture may actually protect vulnerable children, researchers say.

The study followed 1258 young people who were interviewed at ages 11, 13, 15 and 19. It found that of those who considered themselves goths, 53% had self-harmed and 47% had tried to commit suicide. Researchers at University of Glasgow found that while most self-harmers started the practice at age 12 to 13, they did not become goths until they were a couple of years older, on average.

"One common suggestion is they may be copying subcultural icons or peers [when they self-harm], but our study found that more young people reported self-harm before, rather than after, becoming a goth. "Rather than posing a risk, it's also possible that by belonging to the goth subculture, young people are gaining valuable social and emotional support from their peers." says Robert Yang, who led the study.

Michael van Beinum, a psychiatrist for children and adolescents, who advised on the study, agrees: "For some young people with mental health problems, a goth subculture may be attractive as it may allow them to find a community within which it may be easier for their distress to be understood."

(Source: *NewScientist*, Accessed on 21 May 2008  
<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn8996-goth-subculture-may-protect-vulnerable-children.html>)

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#### **5. Self-harmers to be given clean blades**

*Templeton, Sarah-Kate*  
*TimesOnline*, February 05 2006

Nurses want patients who are intent on harming themselves to be provided with clean blades so that they can cut themselves more safely.

They say people determined to harm themselves should be helped to minimise the risk of infection from dirty blades, in the same way as drug addicts are issued with clean needles. This could include giving the

“self-harm” patients sterile blades and clean packets of bandages or ensuring that they keep their own blades clean. Nurses would also give patients advice about which parts of the body it is safer to cut.

However, this harm reduction approach is likely to provoke controversy.

“Nurses who encounter individuals who self-harm on a regular basis face a dilemma. Do they go for prohibition? Or do we allow this to occur in a way that minimises harm?” says Ian Hulatt, mental health adviser for the Royal College of Nursing.

According to proposers of the motion, some nurses already stay with patients while they harm themselves to ensure they do so as safely as possible. One, who declined to be named ahead of the debate, said: “There are some areas of Britain where they have already explored safe self-harm. We may not like someone self-harming, but they are going to do it whether we like it or not and we will need to deal with the problems afterwards.”

(Source: *TimesOnline*, Accessed on 19 May 2008  
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article727174.ece>)

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