

# Do Time Trends Appear in Specific Non-Suicidal Self-Injurious Behaviors and Their Psychological Correlates Among Adolescents Across Two Decades?

3. Epidemiology and surveillance

**Benjamin Claréus<sup>1</sup>**, *Daiva Daukantaitė<sup>2</sup>*, *Margit Wångby-Lundh<sup>2</sup>*, *Lars-Gunnar Lundh<sup>2</sup>*, *Jonas Bjärehed<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Kristianstad University

<sup>2</sup> Lund University

## Abstract text

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI), an important risk factor for suicide, has been reported to increase over time, but less is known about trends in specific self-injurious behaviors (SIBs) and their associations with psychological difficulties. This study examines individual SIBs, their prevalence, co-occurrence, and relationships with psychological difficulties among Swedish adolescents aged 14–15. Data were drawn from the longitudinal SoL-project, with samples collected in the same municipality during two periods: 2007–2008 ( $N \sim 1000$ ) and 2023–2024 ( $N \sim 800$ ).

We observed a significant increase in the prevalence of repetitive NSSI ( $\geq 5$  instances of any SIB) among girls across the two time periods ( $OR = 5.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Increases in SIBs among girls included cutting oneself (21.0%  $\rightarrow$  30.2%), minor cutting (26.3%  $\rightarrow$  32%), burning oneself (13.2%  $\rightarrow$  21.0%), severe scratching (23%  $\rightarrow$  34.4%), sticking sharp objects into the skin (18.5%  $\rightarrow$  25.5%), punching oneself (27.9%  $\rightarrow$  33.7%), and preventing wounds from healing (25.9%  $\rightarrow$  30.1%). In contrast, no significant change in repetitive NSSI prevalence was observed for boys ( $OR = .74$ ,  $p = .515$ ). For specific SIBs among boys, prevalences could be estimated to 7.0–17.1% in 2023–2024, representing a decrease of -14.3% (sticking sharp objects into skin) to -38.3% (preventing wounds from healing) in comparison to 2007–2008. The association between psychological difficulties to repetitive NSSI/specific SIBs was similar between periods for girls/boys. Network analysis of SIB co-occurrence revealed stable, homogenous relationships between periods.

Our findings highlight a troubling increase in specific SIBs among Swedish girls, with consistent associations between these behaviors and psychological difficulties. In contrast, boys exhibited stable or declining patterns. These results emphasize the need for gender-sensitive prevention and intervention strategies focusing on SIBs.

We conclude by outlining future research directions and inviting collaboration to address these trends in adolescent mental health.