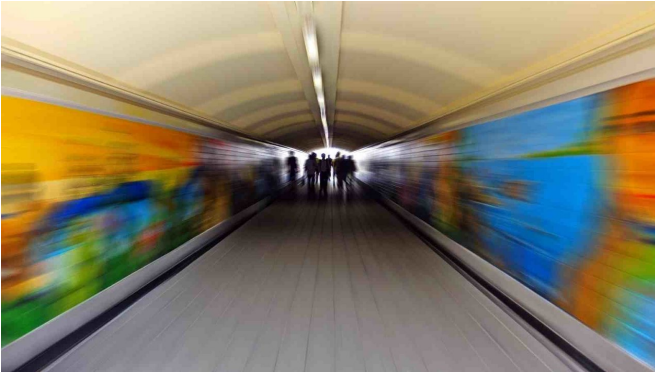


Five-year study provides insights into youth self-injury

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Credit: Victoria University

The [Youth Wellbeing Study](#), led by Professor Marc Wilson from Victoria's School of Psychology and supported by the Health Research Council of New Zealand, focused on non-suicidal self-injury and the factors that place young New Zealanders at the risk of self-injuring.

It involved a longitudinal survey of thousands of 13 to 18-year-olds from 2012 to 2016, focus hui with young people and their whānau and interviews and discussions with school guidance counsellors.

Professor Wilson says that by the end of the study, just under a third of the participants reported hurting themselves.

"The research confirmed that young people hurt themselves for a range of reasons. Managing emotions was the most common function of self-injury, followed by self-punishment, and the desire to feel something."

The [longitudinal survey](#) has been particularly important in investigating the way that self-injury develops over time, says Professor Wilson.

"The vast majority of international research has been cross-sectional, and therefore hasn't allowed for confidence about the factors that play a causal role in self-injury.

"The findings of the Youth Wellbeing Study have shown that, as expected, young people who are less well-equipped to understand and manage their emotions are more likely to manage their emotions through self-injury.

"More importantly, young people's [emotion regulation](#) skills predicted future self-injury, but self-injury also impaired future [emotional](#) skills development. Essentially, because self-injury provided relief for some young people, they may have come to rely on it rather than seeking out safer ways to manage their emotions."

Although the study didn't focus on suicide, just under a fifth of those surveyed met criteria for suicidal concern. The research team plans to carry out future research on the level to which self-injury predicts future suicidal thoughts and behaviour.

"Young people's relationships with their schools and teachers, and particularly parents and family, play a key role in their wellbeing levels," says Dr Jessica Garisch, research fellow and coordinator of the study.

The study involved developing resources for adolescents, their family and the people who work to support them. Two graphic novels themed around self-injury and help-seeking were produced with help from groups of young people, and are available free online. The novels, *A Change* and *A Choice*, were illustrated by Ant Sang, award-winning illustrator of the popular television series *bro'Town*.

The research team now plans to explore the link between non-suicidal [self-injury](#) and suicide, and to develop an emotion regulation training programme

for [young people](#).

Provided by Victoria University

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