

## **Mental Health and Society seminar: Cutting up – self injury and distress Week 23 (that's the week commencing 3/3/2014)**

In week 19 we covered self-injury in class. This session is intended to build your awareness of self injury as a phenomenon, understand why it might be becoming more common and try to make sense of how health professionals, friends and family can do to help individuals who do so. Given that recent survey evidence from a survey commissioned by the Priory Group, widely reported in the press in the UK suggests that as many as 20% of girls self injure during adolescence, if any of you find yourselves working in the helping professions you'll probably see more of it than you do of almost any other 'mental health problem'. As Louis Pasteur was alleged to say 'experience favours the mind prepared'.

There are several things to read for this session. A list of background material can be found at <http://www.brown.uk.com/selfinjury/silist.htm> with texts available online. There are rather a lot there so you might want to read selectively. As a teaching and learning exercise I've deliberately listed a variety of items because there's an important skill I want you to develop. Finding information in psychology (or any other subject) often requires you to skim a large amount of material to discover the answers to your questions. It's a valuable skill for revision, finding material to put in coursework and final year projects. Therefore I want you to skim through the papers available (or find some more if you want) and find what you need to answer the questions below.

This session may assist you with revision of the topic for the exam in May. To make the best of this exercise and turn your revision to best advantage, you might want to consider critically how health practitioners and research hers have tackled self-injury and the extent to which this has benefitted sufferers.

In coming to an understanding of this topic, in reading and thinking about it, you might want to consider the following issues:

Is self injury becoming more common in contemporary developed societies?

Is it easy to do research on the issue? What might the methodological problems be of finding out about a phenomenon like this? How could researchers overcome these?

Why do people self injure?

To what extent is self injury of the kind we have discussed in class related to suicide or attempted suicide?

To what extent does self injury relate to people's experience of abuse in childhood?

Do clients have problems when they seek treatment for their injuries? What kinds of attitudes might they encounter from health care staff? Why do you suppose health care staff might act like this?

What kinds of therapies seem to be helpful from the clients' point of view?

To what extent can self help of the kind offered by community groups, charitable organisations, websites and so on assist young people who self injure? Or does it just encourage them?

How could we reorganise services for people who self injure?

For example what changes could one make to i) primary care ii) specialist secondary services iii) the training of health care staff?

What would happen if there was no intervention at all? Would the phenomenon resolve itself after a while?

How do self injurers' families react when they find out? What support could be offered to family members to assist them in coping?

Don't forget, it helps to read widely and think critically. If your thinking about the issues above throws up any new ideas, have a bit of a hunt around for literature yourself, to see if anyone's thought of it before or tried it out or otherwise written about it. Keep thinking about what it all means from the sufferers' or injurers' point of view and whether any concept or therapeutic approach will work in their interests.