Self-harm is a significant problem in young people. It is the strongest risk factor for suicide, and is the second most common cause of death in children and adolescents globally, after road traffic accidents. This research was the first study to look at self-harm in children and young adults from a general practice perspective, unlike past research which has been hospital-based.

Using the Clinical Practice Research Datalink (CPRD), which is a large database of electronic GP health records in the UK, researchers for the PSTRC (Cathy Morgan, Darren Ashcroft, Roger Webb) identified nearly 17,000 10-19 year olds with a first self-harm episode between 2001 and 2014. We confirmed previous findings of higher rates of self-harm among girls than boys and a strong link with the risk of unnatural death, including suicide. We also found that children attending GP practices located in more deprived areas were less likely to be referred to mental health services, even though incidence of self-harm was highest in these localities - a stark example of Tudor Hart's 'Inverse Care Law' (The Lancet 1971; 297: 405-412). The most striking finding was the 68% increase in self-harm cases in girls aged 13-16 years.

As the first primary care focused investigation of self-harm in children and adolescents, the study highlighted the important role of GPs to monitor, support and refer young people. The observed patterns of risk over time emphasise the urgent need for co-ordinated care through families, schools and healthcare services, to improve safety among these distressed young people in the short term, and to secure their future mental health and wellbeing.

The study was published in the British Medical Journal and was presented and nominated for the North American Primary Care Research Group/SAPC junior travel prize at the Society for Academic Primary Care Annual Scientific Meeting 2017.

The paper received extensive media coverage including:
- the Guardian, October 19 2017: Self-harm among girls aged 13 to 16 rose by 68% in three years, UK study finds
- Reuters Science and Health News: Sharp rise seen in self-harm among young teen girls
- Sky news coverage.

The Altmetric score currently is 497, in the top 5% of all research outputs scored by Altmetric. This includes 504 tweets from 418 tweeters with an upper band of 1,207,630 followers.

Ongoing interest and potential impact on policy include recent reference to our work during the All Party Parliamentary Group discussion on self-harm in England January 30 2018.

Our work has recently been cited in:
- Arensman,E; Corcoran,P; McMahon,E. The iceberg model of self-harm: new evidence and insights. The Lancet Psychiatry 2018 (5);2:p100-101
- Ougrin,D; Asarnow, JR. The end of family therapy for self-harm, or a new beginning? The Lancet Psychiatry:5(3) 2018 188-189
- Peate,I. Mental health provision: Time for a whole-system approach. British Journal of School Nursing, 2018;12(10)
- Modi,N. The case for child health Archives of Disease in Childhood, Archives of Disease in Childhood.