

**[Healthcare Professionals' Implementation of National Guidelines with Patients who Self-Harm](#)**

**Publication details (Vancouver format)**

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**What are the most important findings/conclusions in this paper? Why are they important?**

We had a number of headline findings in this paper:

- almost 86% of UK healthcare professionals had heard of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines for the short- and long-term management of self-harm, but only 24% were knowledgeable about the content of the guidelines
- just 31% of our sample had ever received any training about self-harm
- approximately 2% of healthcare professionals said they used resources that NICE recommends are avoided
- of those healthcare professionals who were aware and knowledgeable about the NICE guidelines for self-harm, 44% used them when meeting with patients who had self-harmed, or who were at risk of self-harm.

**What did you do?**

We conducted an online survey of over 1,000 healthcare professionals working in the UK.

In the survey, we asked participants to rate how much they knew about the NICE guidelines for self-harm. Then we asked whether or not they had ever received any training about self-harm. Participants were also asked to describe any resources or tools that they used to help them to assess and manage patients that had self-harmed. Lastly, healthcare professionals estimated how often they had followed the NICE guidelines in the past when meeting with patients who had self-harmed, or with patients they thought were at risk of self-harm.

**Why did you conduct this research?**

We wanted to expand on existing research by doing a survey to find out levels of awareness of the NICE guidelines for self-harm among a sample of healthcare professionals working in the UK. Our aim was to find out which healthcare professionals were aware of the guidelines, and identify the settings they worked in. We were also interested in finding out whether healthcare professionals had access to training about self-harm, and how often they followed the guidelines when they encountered a patient that had self-harmed.

This information will help us to identify which healthcare professionals need support to follow the guidelines.

**What was known before your paper was published?**

The NICE guidelines for self-harm are aimed at all healthcare professionals in England and Wales who are involved in the care of people that have self-harmed.

Previous studies suggested that many healthcare professionals:

- a. were not aware of national self-harm guidelines
- b. had no training about self-harm
- c. may have been using resources that are advised against in the national guidance.

However, the existing evidence was based on research involving small groups of healthcare professionals, and there were no large, representative studies of healthcare professionals in the UK.

**What is next? What is the potential impact of the work in this paper? What will change as a result of this paper (or the study it describes)?**

Our findings demonstrate that there is a need for healthcare professionals to have better knowledge of the NICE guidelines for self-harm, especially professionals that work outside mental health settings.

We recommend that in addition to increasing access to training, existing training should be improved to help more healthcare professionals to follow the national guidelines. In particular, healthcare professionals need to know which resources the guidelines do and do not recommend for use with patients.

We suggest that future research should try to identify what enables and prevents healthcare professionals from following the NICE guidelines on self-harm.

**Does this paper link in to a particular study / project? If so, please summarise the study and explain how this paper has improved understanding, or will move the study forward.**

This paper was the first study from Jessica Leather's PhD project, which involves developing an intervention to support healthcare professionals to follow national guidance when they encounter someone who has self-harmed. The results of this study will be used to identify which healthcare professionals are most in need of support to use the national guidelines for self-harm, so that an intervention can be targeted towards their needs.

The next step of the project is to identify the factors that enable, or prevent professionals from following national guidelines.