

NIHR Greater Manchester PSTRC

Plain English Publication Summary

Publication: [Examining drivers of self-harm guideline implementation by general practitioners: A qualitative analysis using the theoretical domains framework. British Journal of Health Psychology](#)

Publication details (Vancouver format)

Leather J, Keyworth C, Kapur N, Campbell S, Armitage CJ. Examining drivers of self-harm guideline implementation by general practitioners: A qualitative analysis using the theoretical domains framework. British Journal of Health Psychology. 2022. doi: 10.1111/bjhp.12598

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

The main findings are:

- GPs need more training to address skill gaps relating to talking about self-harm.
- NICE guidelines for self-harm need to be made clearer and more accessible for quick-reference to support decision-making.
- More guidance is needed about supporting patients who self-harm while they are waiting for a referral to mental health services.

These issues need to be addressed in interventions to support GPs in following best practice for patients who self-harm.

What did you do?

We interviewed 21 GPs. In the interviews, we asked GPs to describe the things that prevented them from following the recommendations in the national guidance for self-harm. We also wanted to find out which things helped GPs to follow the national guidelines. We used something called a 'behavioural science framework' to categorise the different challenges and enablers (the things that helped GPs to follow recommendations). Then we used something called the Behaviour Change Wheel to identify intervention strategies that could help GPs to follow the NICE guidelines for self-harm.

Why did you conduct this research?

We wanted to expand on existing research by finding out what hinders and helps GPs when they meet a patient who has self-harmed. Existing research about how GPs care for people who have self-harmed had not been based upon behaviour change theories, which are used to help decide which drivers (the things that influence people to behave the way they do) to target in interventions. To address this research gap, we used a behavioural science framework to explore GPs' challenges and enablers to following national guidance for self-harm, and suggest strategies that could be used in an intervention.

What was known before your paper was published?

Many people who self-harm are cared for in general practices, meaning GPs have opportunities to recognise and intervene in self-harm. Previous studies found that GPs do not always follow national guidelines for self-harm, due to a lack of knowledge and poor access to training. However, there was little information about other factors that might affect whether GPs are able to follow the NICE guidance, and there were no clear strategies about how best to support GPs when they meet a patient that has self-harmed.

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 analysis used the Theoretical Domains Framework (TDF) to identify targets for change, and we used the Behaviour Change Wheel to provide examples of how other researchers and policymakers could design interventions to meet these targets. For example, poor access to resources and time pressures were common reasons for not following guidelines, because these are not easy to change. The Behaviour Change Wheel suggests that a useful strategy to address this would be to change the environment that GPs work in, to enable them to follow the guidance. Future work needs to be targeted towards policymakers and government health departments to address these barriers at a policy level.

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 is a 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 have been used to identify potential strategies to help GPs. The next step of the project is to use these strategies to design an effective intervention to support GPs to follow the self-harm guidelines.