

What is self-injury?

Self-injury is any form of self-harm which involves causing injuries or pain to your own body. It can take many forms.

The most common form of self-injury is probably cutting. Some women may also burn themselves, punch themselves or hit their bodies against something. Some women pick their skin or pull out hair.

How common is self-injury?

Self-injury is far more common than most people think. All sorts of people self-injure and often there is little outward sign that anything is wrong. A lot of people who self-injure find it very difficult to talk about and may believe they are the only person that does it. Fear and shame may force them to keep it secret for many years. As a result no one really knows how big the problem is.

Why do women self-injure?

There are always powerful reasons why someone self-injures. For most it is a way of coping with great emotional pain. Many people cope with their problems in ways that are too risky and harmful to themselves. Some drink or eat too much, smoke, drive too fast, gamble or make themselves ill through overwork or worry. They might do this to numb or distract themselves from problems or feelings they cannot bear to face.

Women from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups and Self-Injury (BME)

It is crucial that the specific issues surrounding women from BME groups who self-injure are taken into account. This leaflet highlights some of these issues.

Racism

Racism is an ever-present factor in the lives of women from BME groups. These women face discrimination in the fields of housing, employment and education and this should be always be considered when looking at issues around emotional distress and self-injury.

Some women from BME groups may be concerned that they are more vulnerable to being caught up in the mental health system or fear they will be racially stereotyped if they do access support services.

Generational Clash

As an increased number of generations are born in the UK, young women from BME groups are becoming more westernised. Second and third generations may consider themselves British and want to live and behave in the same way as other young British women. Family clashes may be caused by younger generations feeling little or no connection with their parent's country. As a result elder generations may feel that their values and culture are being eroded and may place additional pressure on young women to conform to old or traditional cultural values.

Language

Language barriers are different for different generations of women that live in the UK. Isolation can be a major factor for women from BME groups who face language barriers. These women may have little or no social networks and may rely heavily on members of their family. They may be unaware of services where they can improve their language skills and increase their social networks. Some women may live in areas where there are little or no community based services or in mostly white communities where assimilation may be very difficult.

Izzat and Sharam

The concepts of Izzat (Honour) and Sharam (Shame) are an ever-present factor for Asian, Muslim and women from other cultures. These two concepts relate to every aspect of their behaviour linking directly to the respectability and social standing of their family within the local community.

Control

Izzat and Sharam can put huge pressure on women. They may feel constantly controlled, watched and judged. These concepts are strongly linked with a woman's sexual behaviour and may lead to restrictions on all aspects of her social life. There may also be very high expectations on young women to achieve academically or in the workplace. Anything women do must be in accordance to upholding and increasing the family honour and can place tight parameters on the choices and decisions that women can make.

Domestic Violence

Within some cultures domestic violence is accepted and widespread. It can exist within marital relationships, but can often include abuse from in-laws or male siblings. Women may be told to 'put up with it' rather than leave and put shame on the family.

Stigma

Within many cultures there is a huge stigma for those suffering from mental health problems or emotional distress and women may feel unable to access support services or talk to people outside of the community.

What can help?

There are always important reasons for self-injury. Once someone can uncover and resolve the roots of her desperation, she may no longer need this coping strategy.

Helplines

Some helplines focus on specific issues such as self-injury or domestic violence and may have interpreting services for women that don't speak English.

Counselling

Many women want the opportunity to understand and resolve the feelings that lead to their self-injury, through talking on a regular basis to someone who will listen, accept and support them.

Information

Access to information about self-injury can empower women to understand and become more aware of the issues involved. The Bristol Crisis Service for Women have a booklet specifically for women from black and minority ethnic groups who self-injure.

Asian Resource Centre. 110-114 Hamstead Road, Handsworth, Birmingham B19 2QS. Tel. 0121 551 4518.

Chinese Information and Advice Centre. 104-108 Oxford Street, London. Tel: 020 7323 1538.

London Irish Women's Centre. 59 Stoke Newington, Church St, London, N16 0AR. Tel: 020 7249 7318.

Newham Asian Women's Project. 661 Barking Rd, Plaistow, London, E13 9EX. Tel: 020 8472 0528.

Pukaar. 4 Hanworth Rd, Hounslow, Middlesex, TW3 1UA. Tel. 020 8577 6059

Sheffield African Caribbean Mental Health Association. 10 Breinburg Court, 263 Pitmoor Road, Sheffield, S3 9AQ. Tel. 0114 272 6393.

Southall Black Sisters. 21 Avenue Rd, Southall, Middlesex, UB2 4DW. Tel: 020 8571 9595.

Vietnamese Mental Health Services. Thomas Calton Centre, Alpha St, Peckham. London. Tel: 020 7639 2288.

This leaflet and related booklet available in Bengali, Chinese, Punjabi and Urdu.

**Bristol Crisis Service for Women
Helpline: 0117 925 1119
Friday and Saturday evenings
9.00 pm – 12.30 am
Sundays 6.00 pm – 9.00 pm**

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Women from Black & Minority Ethnic Groups & Self-Injury

**Bristol Crisis Service for Women
PO Box 654 Bristol BS99 1XH
www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk**

**Helpline: 0117 925 1119
Office/Admin: 0117 927 9600**

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