

## SUMMARIZING WHAT WE KNOW

- Self-harm in older adults is a concern.
- There is increased risk of self-harm repetition and suicide in older people.
- Other health related problems are frequent in older adults, and therefore increased access to means (e.g. medication).
- Social isolation, previous mental health problems, financial problems, alcohol and drug use increases risk of self-harm in older adults.
- Older adults visit their GP's more frequently, giving an opportunity of detection, access to support and possible prevention.



## GETTING HELP

### HELPLINES

#### **Samaritans**

(Open 24/7)

**116 123**

#### **Silver Line**

(Helpline for older people)

**0800 470 8090**

#### **Age UK**

(Helpline for older people)

**0800 055 6112**

### ONLINE

#### **Mind**

(National Organisation)

**mind.org.uk**

#### **National Self-harm network**

(Online forum)

**nshn.co.uk**

#### **Harmless**

(National Organisation)

**harmless.org.uk**

### YOUR GP

Your local GP will be able to provide advice and support.

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## SELF-HARM IN OLDER ADULTS

This leaflet aims to give information to people affected by self-harm.

The Keele difference

## INTRODUCTION

Self-harm can affect anyone regardless of age but most of the research on self-harm is about younger people.

## WHAT IS SELF-HARM?

There are different definitions as well as words used to describe self-harm.

In the UK, the definition which is mostly used is the one provided by NICE (National Institute of Health and Care Excellence):

*"any act of self-poisoning or self-injury carried out by a person irrespective of motivation"*\*.

Other words used to describe self-harm:

- Self-injury
- Overdose
- Cutting

Others define self-harm as a coping mechanism that is harmful to a person's well-being.

## COMMON SELF-HARM METHODS

People self-harm in different ways, but common methods are cutting, burning, overdosing, and hitting one self. In older people, overdose of tablets, often in the context of alcohol use, is common.

## WHY IS SELF-HARM IMPORTANT IN OLDER ADULTS?

Despite not being as common as in younger people, self-harm is a concern amongst older adults as self-harm is a risk factor for suicide, and suicide rates are amongst the highest in older men. Self-harm can be hidden – and is not always recognized as a problem by the person or others.

### HOUSING OR FINANCIAL WORRIES

### BEREAVEMENT SOCIAL ISOLATION

### HEALTH CONDITIONS

### ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

### PAST MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AND/OR SELF-HARM/AGE

## WHAT MAKES OLDER ADULTS SELF-HARM?

Not every older adult who harms him or herself does so with the wish to end their life. Other reasons may be to seek help, gain relief from emotional pain, escape a situation they feel is intolerable, amongst others.

## WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Research suggests that older people with mental health, physical, social, and personal problems are at increased risk of self-harm.

## RISK FACTORS FOR SELF-HARM IN OLDER ADULTS

