

What is Self-Injury and How Does it Impact Hispanic/Latine Youth?



**HISPANIC/LATINO
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

By Annelie Han
Luz Garcini, PhD., MPH

Overview

Self-injury is hurting your own body to ease painful emotions. It may take many forms such as cutting, burning, or hitting yourself. Without treatment, self-injury may lead to suicide if self-injury no longer works.

Self-injury is within the continuum of self-harming behaviors and constitutes actual physical harm. **Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI)** is a term used in clinical practice and psychological research. It is a behavior that involves purposely harming oneself without the intention to die. NSSI may be a way of coping with emotional distress or expressing intense feelings.

Self-injury often **STARTS** in adolescence

13-23% of adolescents engage in at least one type of self-injury

Self-injury is **NOT** attention-seeking

Self-Injury Risk Factors

- Peer Pressure
- Shaming and Bullying
- Trauma and Abuse
- Family Problems
- Immigration Stress
- Poverty and Financial Risk
- Mental Health Stigma
- Mental Illness
- Loneliness and Isolation

Latine Youth

Some studies have found that **Latina adolescents may be more likely to engage in self-injury** than other ethnic groups, especially if they experience transnational stress (such as separation from family members from their country of origin) or bullying.

More research is needed in this area to understand the intersections of cultural factors and self-harming behaviors among Latinas. A recent report indicated that in the past year, **60% of Latine LGBTQIA+ young people reported incidents of self-injury** compared to 54% of the overall sample of LGBTQIA+ young people.



Recognize Warning Signs of Self-Injury

- Frequent unexplained injuries (cuts, burns, among others)
- Scars on the skin in patterns or shapes
- Hiding injuries or scars
- Difficulty handling emotions
- Isolation or avoiding people
- Loss of interest or sad mood
- Impulsivity

What Helps if You Know Someone Who Self-Injures?

- Avoid blame and judgement
- Find or offer support
- Listen in order to understand
- Do not dismiss or ignore
- Do not label as “attention-seeking”
- Learn about self-injury
- Do not impose or control
- Seek treatment

What is the Treatment for Self-Injury?

Treatment often involves therapy and medication. Two forms of therapy that work are Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). The combination of therapy and medication is the best approach.

Treating self-injury takes time, but with support, recovery is possible!

The Hispanic/Latino Behavioral Health Center of Excellence recognizes the complexities associated with gender and ethnic identification, as well as the right of all individuals to self-identify. HLBH CoE uses the term Latine with the intention of both facilitating fluent reading and pronunciation and supporting an inclusive and respectful language. Latine is a gender-neutral form of the word Latino that uses the letter e at the end, an idea native to the Spanish language.

The Hispanic/Latino Behavioral Health Center of Excellence is led by the Institute of Research, Education, and Services in Addiction at the Universidad Central del Caribe School of Medicine and is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration under grant number H79FG001136.

References

- 1 Kerr, P.L. Muehlenkamp, J. J., & Turner, J. M. (2010). Nonsuicidal self-injury: a review of current research for family medicine and primary care physicians. *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine: JABFM*, 23(2), 240-259. <https://doi.org/10.3122/jabfm.2010.02.090110>
- 2 Peterson, J., Freedenthal, S., Sheldon, C., & Andersen, R. (2008). Nonsuicidal Selfinjury in Adolescents. *Psychiatry (Edgmont (Pa.: Township))*, 5(11), 20-26.
- 3 Gulbas, L.E., Hausmann-Stabile, C. De Luca, S. M., Tyler, T. R., & Zayas, L. H (2015). An exploratory study of nonsuicidal self-injury and suicidal behaviors in adolescent Latinas. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 85(4), 302-314. <https://psycenet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/ort0000073>
- 4 Madubata, I.J., Cheref, S., Eades, N.D., Brooks, J.R., Talavera, D.C. & Walker, R. L. (2020.) Non-Suicidal Self-Injury, Neuroticism, and Ethnicity in Young Latina Adults. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 42(4), 528-546. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986320950914>
- 5 Price, M.N., Nath, R., DeChants, J.P., Hobaica, S., Suffredini, K. (2023). The Mental Health and Well-Being of Latinx LGBTQ Young People. The Trevor Project.