



# Research Directions

Office of Research Services

## ***Understanding Self-Harm***

**Dr Tanya Covic and Professor Jane Ussher from the School of Psychology are collaborating with the Nepean Division of General Practice (NDGP) and schools in the Penrith Local Government area to study self-harm and risk-taking behaviours amongst high school students in Western Sydney.**



'Self-harm is one of four top concerns to young people in Australia aged 11 to 19 years' says Dr Covic. 'Self-harm is closely related to suicide, depression and risk-taking behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse. While self-harm most commonly refers to behaviours such as cutting, burning and other forms of tissue destruction, it can also manifest itself through other behaviours, such as abusive relationships.'

At a local level, the Nepean Division of General Practice (NDGP), through their youth health medical services, has noted increased reports of harmful behaviours amongst young people and the need to better identify and tailor their services to provide information and help that is appropriate and relevant to young people. 'Self-harm behaviour peaks during adolescence and those adolescents most in need of help are the least likely to seek help, with only half of those seeking help actually receiving it. NDGP seeks to address this gap at the local level. The aim of our pilot study is to identify the range of self-harmful behaviours in young high school students, as a first step in informing the health services provided by NDGP to the local schools' says Dr Covic.

Working closely with NDGP and key staff and students in the Nepean district, the research team will conduct focus group interviews with school counsellors, year-advisors, student welfare team members, principals, executive staff and student representative council members to assess the needs of this group and their concerns, opinions and experiences of self-harm amongst their students. Year 10 students will also be surveyed to find out about how much self-harm behaviour is occurring, and if students' are using help services and support resources.

This pilot research will assist the NDGP and participating schools with understanding and implementing strategies for dealing with issues of self-harm and risk-taking amongst the youth of Western Sydney. It will form the basis of larger studies to contribute to improving the physical and psychological lives of young people and their families all over Australia.

**Project Title: Inside Out Project: Needs Analysis:** Pilot study to identify youth self-harm and risk-taking behaviour concerns in the Penrith Local Government Area.

**Funding has been set at: \$7,700**  
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