

THE IMPACT OF NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS

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OBJECTIVES. The present study examined: (1) whether freshmen with a history of Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) perform academically worse than peers without NSSI; (2) to what extent the impact of NSSI is influenced by the academic performance standard of the department to which students belong.

METHOD. Data came from the Leuven College Surveys, as a part of the WHO World Mental Health Surveys International College Student Project. A total of 4,921 freshmen were included (Response Rate = 65.38%). NSSI was assessed with the Self-injurious Thoughts and Behaviors Interview, and linked with the academic year percentage (AYP). Data were analyzed within a multilevel framework of college departments, were weighted and controlled for sociodemographic and college-specific covariates.

RESULTS. In total, 223 (5.46%) students engaged in NSSI in the past (i.e., > 12 months), and additionally 111 (2.69%) students self-injured within the past year. Students with past NSSI, β (SE) = -3.78 (1.12), 95%CI [-5.98;-1.58], as well as with 12-month NSSI, β (SE) = -5.66 (2.68), 95%CI [-10.91;-0.41], performed worse than peers without NSSI. A negative association was found between the impact of 12-month NSSI and the average departmental AYP ($r = -.705, p < .001$).

CONCLUSION. Freshmen with past or recent NSSI are at higher risk for academic failure than peers without NSSI. Context clearly matters for freshmen who recently engaged in NSSI: the detrimental effect on AYP was more/less pronounced, respectively, when they belonged to a higher/lower achieving department (compared with the general academic performance standard).

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