

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

**The Role of Extraversion Rejection-
Sensitivity in Non-Suicidal Self-Injury**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's Degree in
the School of Education, Bar-Ilan University

Ramat Gan, Israel

2017

ABSTRACT

Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) refers to behaviors in which people inflict direct and deliberate self-injury by destroying body tissues without suicidal intentions (Nock, Joiner, Gordon, Lloyd-Richardson & Prinstein, 2006). This behavior of self-injury without suicidal intention is more common in recent years among teenagers and young adults between the age of 14-25 (Swannell et al., 2014) and occurs mainly among females (Hawton et al., 2012). The prevalence of NSSI among teenagers is about 17% (Swannell et al., 2014) while in Israel it is about 32.6% (Health et al., 2011).

One of the explanations for this type of behavior is that this is the way the individual chooses to express himself in this language of inflicting pain rather than another method. Other explanations are that the pain makes him feel better and it meets his needs; it makes him feel alive, to physically feel his body, to attract attention from the environment, etc.

In the previous DSM, the NSSI appears only as a symptom of a borderline personality disorder, and as a symptom of major depression. So, people who hurt themselves in this way do not get an appropriate diagnosis, and as a result they do not receive proper treatment. In the DSM-5 there is a request to check if this phenomenon should be diagnosed by itself, (Knock & Favazza, 2009), and hence there is a need to research the subject.

In spite of the unambiguous fact that NSSI and suicide are two different phenomena, there are questions about the link between them. Most studies about self-injury are about suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts, and only a minority are about NSSI.

There have been different studies about NSSI and its link to extroversion, but not as a main topic of research (Apter et al., 1995; Beautrais et al., 2000; Verona, 2000; Verona, Patrick & Joiner, 2001). In those studies a link was found between NSSI and high extroversion, as well as between NSSI and low extroversion (introversion). The novelty of this research is to refer to all levels of extroversion as within the norm, and not to refer to the two extremes of extroversion as disorders.

In addition to those studies which check the correlation between extroversion and NSSI, there are studies which explore NSSI and rejection-sensitivity, but not as a direct correlation. In the research literature which discussed the link between NSSI and

rejection-sensitivity it has been found that there is a link between NSSI and rejection-sensitivity, including the link between NSSI and the influence of the social environment, the will to make a social relationship, and the nature of maternal attachment (Ashkar et al., 2006; Giletta, Scholte, Engels, Ciairano & Prinstein, 2012).

The novelty in this research is the accuracy in the sensitivity to social rejection and The examination of the direct link between this subject to NSSI, because until now there has not been a research that connected between those three subjects under one title and checked the link between them.

On the basis of findings from previous researchers, the research hypothesis is that rejection-sensitivity will mediate the degree of extroversion and NSSI.

594 students aged 14-18 from different schools in Israel participated in our studies (54.4% boys, 55.6% girls, average age 14.96, standard deviation 1.33). During this study the students answered three questionnaires: NSSI (Gratz, 2001), Extroversion (John & Srivastava, 1999) and rejection-sensitivity (Downey, Lebolt, Rincón, & Freitas, 1998).

In order to check the hypothesis we checked mediation by analyzing the logistic biner regression which has been tested separately for each kind of self-injury, and then all the kinds together. In the first step of this analysis we checked, extroversion. And in the second step we checked rejection-sensitivity (for the two criteria: self confidence and stress), This was in order to check if it is variable mediate.

The comparison has been made between two groups of NSSI (with injury and without). The findings from this examination are that:

1. Rejection-sensitivity mediates the link between extroversion and NSSI when the degree of extroversion is lower.
2. When there was rejection-sensitivity which was caused by stress, more students hurt themselves.
3. More boys hurt themselves by head punches, and more girls hurt themselves by self-cutting.

In light of those findings, there are a few important conclusions.

1. To establish mediation projects that will detect students with rejection-sensitivity. This data will allow us as educators to find and identify high-risk students and to support them, as a primary prevention factor before injuring themselves. In this prevention program there will be an emphasis on strengthening each student's level of self-esteem in social interactions, which will be a preventative factor against

NSSI. This program will revolve around the subject of the rejection-sensitivity as a mediator.

2. It is importance identify adolescents with low levels of extroversion, as well as adolescents with rejection-sensitivity.

Adolescents spend most of their days at school. This allows the educators and treatment team to identify the student's problems, and to give an initial response to the need to self-injure and thus prevent it.

Additionally, research reveals that educators are significant figures in the lives of youth (Heath, 2011). They influence students and play a key role in supporting them. As stated above, the research findings point out that there is a correlation between the level of extroversion and rejection-sensitivity. This strengthens the importance of enabling educators to identify adolescents with these criteria.

This research has several limitations. This is a correlation research, and its purpose is to describe and define the NSSI, and to check the links between variables in relationship to this behavior. As a result there is no possibility to induce causality from this research. In addition, as the research has been made in a school setting, there is a possibility that the students were under external influences that could constitute a limitation in the result of the research. Further research proposals could include longitudinal research and also increase the sample to the whole country and include other educational frameworks.