

**BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

**The role of teacher's psychological support and parental  
relation in non-suicidal self-injury behaviors among youth**

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## **Abstract**

Educators and counselors have become aware of the growing phenomenon of non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) among young people in recent years. This phenomenon is defined as causing intentional damage to body tissues, without death intentions, and regardless of cultural act (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Nock, 2010). NSSI at first appears as initial hazard and could lead to further serious damages, from physical and emotional scars to addiction behaviors (Nixon, Cloutier & Aggarwal, 2002; Nock & Prinstein, 2004). In addition, NSSI serves as an indicator for suicidal thoughts and suicide in practice (Chu et al., 2018; Hamza, Stewart & Willoughby, 2012; Liu, 2016).

NSSI occurs among 17% Of the population between ages 12-14 up to early twenties (Swannell, Martin, Page, Hasking & St John, 2014). Although this behavior appears to be similar in different cultures, the prevalence of this phenomenon in Israel is relatively high in comparison to other European countries (Brunner et al., 2014). In addition, NSSI mostly remains in the interest of psychiatric and psychological research fields, while the actual detection and follow-up are mostly within school context (Roberts-Dobie & Donatelle, 2007). For instance, most educational counselors report at least one NSSI case a year, among their students (Duggan, Heath, Toste & Ross, 2011). Nevertheless, educators report a sense of incompetence to respond and make any interventions on those cases, due to a lack of appropriate training and policy (Heath, Toste, Sornberger & Wagner, 2011; Roberts-Dobie & Donatelle, 2007). Accordingly, this study aims to shed light on the teacher's unique role in the educational framework.

Recent studies regarding NSSI among adolescents had focused primarily on individual characteristics, such as depressive symptoms (e.g. Kleiman, Ammerman, Look, Berman & McCloskey, 2014; You & Leung, 2012), and background factors (e.g. Gonçalves et al., 2016; Muehlenkamp, Peat, Claes & Smits, 2012; Tatnell, Hasking, Newman, Taffe & Martin, 2016),

whereas less emphasis was given on the role of school-related factors in NSSI (Jiang, You, Zheng & Lin, 2017; Nock, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to explore the relationships between teachers' support, parent relations and NSSI within school context.

Accordingly, studies have found that the quality of the adolescent's relationship with their immediate environment, especially parents, is crucial to their ability to adopt adaptive coping methods in stress situations (Yurkowski et al., 2015), given that NSSI is often used as a non-adaptive mechanism for dealing with another problem (Zetterqvist, 2018). The environment frequently serves as a powerful factor in abandoning the harmful role (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012), or, alternatively, may enforce and preserve the injury (Cerutti, Zuffian & Spensieri, 2018). In addition, NSSI can be created and encouraged by the environment, regardless of previous distress, which is known in the literature as "contagion" (Zhu et al., 2016).

The research literature on NSSI relates to the quality of adolescent's parental relations as a major risk indicator in understanding the phenomenon. The quality of the parental relations has been examined in various contexts: parental control, criticism, the purchase of values and justice, support, perceived parenthood, abuse and parental violence (Ammerman & Brown, 2018; Baetens et al., 2014; Buser, Buser & Kearney, 2012; Christie-Mizell, Keil, Laske & Stewart, 2011; Emery, Heath & Rogers, 2017; Gratz & Chapman, 2007; Halstead, Pavkov, Hecker & Seliner, 2014; Lang & Sharma-Patel, 2011; Martin, Bureau, Cloutier & Lafontaine, 2011; Saldias et al., 2013; Tatnell, Kelada, Hasking & Martin, 2014; Wedig & Nock, 2007; You & Leung, 2012). The common denominator for those is the recognition of parental relations' quality as highly important in the development and preservation of the self-injury. However, it is possible that the strong correlation between parental relations and NSSI can be mediated by teachers' support of students' psychological needs, which is left understudied. Teens spend many hours in educational frameworks, and often meet with influential and

supportive educational figures (Arbuthnott & Lewis, 2015). The Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) emphasizes the student's basic psychological needs' support as a key factor affecting adaptive behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2011). Teacher's support for the student's sense of autonomy, relatedness and competence has been found in previous studies as related to many positive outcomes, including mental measures. Teacher's support of psychological needs has the ability to stabilize the mechanism of confidence and resilience among adolescent which will strengthen the relationship between teacher and student (Madjar , Nave & Hen, 2013).

Hence, this study examines the relationship between teacher's support of autonomy, relatedness and competence, and NSSI. In addition, this study examines the relationship between parental relations' quality and NSSI among their children, and the interaction between the teacher's support and parental relations regarding NNSI. The environment has an impact on his behaviors, including NSSI.

Accordingly, it was hypothesized that the quality of parental relations will be negatively correlated with NSSI. Later, it was hypothesized that the teacher's support of the student's psychological needs will also be negatively correlated to NSSI. These two hypotheses were confirmed. Finally, it was hypothesized that the teacher's support of the student's psychological needs will moderate the relationship between parental relations and NSSI. This hypothesis was partially confirmed.

While no adequate interaction was found between the variables, it was argued that no matter how high will be the support from educational figure, it cannot sufficiently moderate the correlation between parental relations and NNSI, excluding cases of self-punch. The findings of this study lead to the discussion which offers educators and counselors to strengthen the relationship between adolescents and their parents and to create ongoing cooperation with

them. This can reduce NSSI rates, alongside with teacher's support of the student's psychological needs.

In the book of diagnoses DSM-5, the NSSI phenomenon is considered "a new disorder that needs further research". Therefore, the present study responds to this call, along with the field's requirements, and even got published in the "European Psychiatry" journal, as part of a research project led by Dr. Nir Madjar.