

Research project on motives and mental health in self-harming

Dear potential participant,

We hereby invite you to participate in a university research project to help shed light on self-harming.

It is fully up to you whether you wish to participate. If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the questions, you may skip questions or fully withdraw from the study with no explanation required. Your participation is also confidential. That means that no identifiable data will be registered and you cannot be identified, even by the researchers involved in the project. This also means that we will not be able to delete your data at a later time, as we will not be able to identify any one participant as you.

This study is conducted at the University of Southern Denmark by researchers at the Department of Psychology and the National Center of Psychotraumatology under the title “Motives and correlates for self-harm”. SDU is responsible for your data which will be treated in accordance with Danish and EU law on data registration, the GDPR (please see [this document](#) on data treatment), regardless of where you are situated in the world. This ensures that your data will be treated securely and confidentially and will exclusively be used for research covered by the aims described below. The project leader is Dorte Mølgaard Christiansen, PhD (please see contact information at the end of this letter).

The purpose of the study is to contribute to knowledge and understanding of self-harm and related concepts, including risk factors, mental health, role of sex, gender, and sexuality, and involvement in e-communities focusing on self-harm. The study has 4 primary aims:

1. To examine motives for and ways of engaging in self-harming behaviours, including motives for self-improvement.
2. To examine the role of risk factors, trauma history, and mental health in self-harming,
3. To examine motives for engaging in self-harm-focused social media forums, including how the members of such communities benefit from and are affected by their engagement in such e-communities
4. To examine the influence of gender and gender-related factors, including sexual identity, on self-harming. This final aim of the project overlaps with a different project which aims to validate a new sex, gender, and sexuality questionnaire currently under development.

If you wish to take part in the study, all you need to do is click the provided link which will take you to a secure Surveyxact server where you will be asked a number of questions. Filling out the questionnaire takes approximately 20-40 minutes, depending on your answers. If you wish to take a break, you will unfortunately not be able to return at a later time to finish the questionnaire. Therefore, we recommend that you fill out the questionnaire at a time when you do not expect to be disturbed. If you wish to skip a question or leave the study without answering further questions, you may do so at any time.

Who can participate

Any e-community* user and/or individual who at times engage in self-harming behaviours who:

- Is 18 years of age or over
- Understands English well enough to understand the information included here
- Consents to the use of their data in research for the purposes described above

* We use the term e-communities here to refer to any group, sub-reddit, profile, messaging board etc. on any form of social media that serves as a forum for users to view, read, share, or discuss self-harming material.

What is required of you?

All you have to do is follow this [link](#) and answer the questions listed in the questionnaire. You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer. Unfortunately, you will not be able to leave the survey once started to finish at a later time, as there is no way of linking you your specific When you are done you will be given the opportunity to provide an e-mail address if you are interested in receiving an invitation to an online presentation on the study's main findings presented by the researchers for a non-academic audience. If you wish to do so, you will be provided with a link to a new questionnaire where you may write your email address so that we can send you an invitation. Your email address will not be used for any purpose other than inviting you to the presentation, it will not be shared with anyone else, and it will not be linked to the data provided in the questionnaire. Your email address will be deleted after the presentation (we will keep it up until then in case of re-scheduling).

Will it be uncomfortable?

Participants will be asked questions relating to self-harm, trauma, and mental health problems. This may be uncomfortable or triggering for some. Though this may feel uncomfortable and bring back unpleasant memories, research suggests that there are no lasting negative effects from being asked such questions. If at any time you feel too uncomfortable, you are welcome to skip questions or drop out from the study. You will be given opportunities throughout the questionnaire to provide additional information and elaborate your answers. Prior research suggests that many participants find it cathartic and even healing to be given this opportunity, and if you are currently in therapy, you are welcome to fill out the questionnaire together with your psychologist/therapist, just as long as you are still the one to answer the questions.

If non-suicidal self-injury or suicidal behaviour is present for you, and the urge to self-harm and/or thoughts of suicide become increasingly intrusive, please make contact with local Samaritans, Helplines, mental health professionals, family, friends, or trusted others to gain support. If you experience an acute crisis, please seek help from a local emergency services. Please read the provided document "[Resources for suicide prevention](#)" on how to get help.

Which data do we collect and how do we treat it?

We collect only the data that you share with us. This includes data on background info (including ethnicity, country of origin, and age), self-harm, social media use (related to self-harm), mental health, sex, gender identity, and sexual identity, and social support. Your data will be protected by the University of Southern Denmark under Danish and European Union Law as described in the legal document on data treatment provided [here](#). Your data will be used exclusively for research

under the goals described above. You can see a full list of the data collected and how they are treated in the document titled “Information on the processing of personal data”.

Would you be interested in participating in an interview?

In addition to the questionnaire part of the study, we also wish to conduct a few online interviews. We are therefore also looking for a few participants who are willing to participate in an online interview focusing on motives and benefits from engaging in e-communities. The interview will take approximately one hour and be conducted in English over a secure connection via Zoom during May-December 2022. If you are interested in participating in an interview, and if you participate/engage in one or more social media forums, accounts, sub-reddits, message boards, etc. focusing on self-harming, please email project leader Dorte M. Christiansen at dochristiansen@health.sdu.dk.

Who is responsible for the study?

The project is carried out by University of Southern Denmark (SDU). Research leader is Dorte M. Christiansen, PhD, Department of Psychology and National Center of Psychotraumatology, Odense, Denmark. The project has been approved by the Regional Ethics Committee at the SDU. No one involved in the study or its funding has any conflict of interest that may in any way interfere with the study’s findings and the reporting of these findings.

Why should I participate?

We invite you to participate because we believe that research, knowledge, and understanding of self-harm is necessary for health care personnel and policy makers to understand self-harming, how it relates to mental health, why people engage in self-harming, why they keep doing it, what helps, and what doesn’t help.

How will results be shared?

The results from the study will first and foremost be published as articles in international peer-reviewed psychology journals. In addition, results will be included in a master thesis. Finally, all participants who are interested in learning of the study findings and provide their email address by clicking the link in the end of the questionnaire, will be invited to attend an online presentation in which the main findings will be presented for a non-academic audience. No personalised information will be presented.

Do you have any further questions?

All information regarding this study, including this document, is [available](#) here.

If you have any doubts or further questions, please feel free to contact project leader Dorte M. Christiansen via the contact information included below. Please make sure not to include any sensitive personal information in your email.

If you wish to learn more about how we protect your data or if you have any questions or concerns regarding data protection, you can contact the SDU data protection officer Simon Kamber on phone at +4565503906 or in email at dpo@sdu.dk.

If you have any complaints about the study, please see www.datatilsynet.dk for how to complain.

None of those involved in the project have any conflict of interest in the study, nor are they connected with anyone (person, company, or foundation) who has such conflicts of interest.

We hope that you with this information feel adequately equipped to decide whether you wish to participate in the study. If you know of anyone who may be interested in participating and who may meet the study criteria, we will appreciate if you will share the link with them (<https://www.surveyxact.dk/LinkCollector?key=6DR5Y9EWLNC2>). Sharing the link will not give them access to your answers.

Thank you for your time and your consideration!

Best wishes,
Project leader
Dorte M. Christiansen
National Center of Psychotraumatology
Department of Psychology
University of Southern Denmark
Campusvej 55
5230 Odense M
Denmark
Tlf: +45 65 50 83 43
Mail: dochristiansen@health.sdu.dk