

# Research project on sexualised self-injury

Dear potential participant,

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

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 anonymous and fully confidential. That means that no directly 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 upon request, as we will not be able to identify any one participant as you.

This study is conducted at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU) by researchers at the Department of Psychology and the National Center of Psychotraumatology under the title “Sexualised self-injury in NSSI e-communities” (NSSI stands for non-suicidal self-injury, also known as self-harm). SDU is responsible for your data which will be treated in accordance with Danish and EU law on data registration and management, the General Data Protection Act (GDPR) (please see attached 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 examine experiences, motives, and thoughts related to sexualised self-injury in the context of non-suicidal self-injury (self-harm). We wish to examine when sexual behaviour becomes self-injury and how different factors are related to sexualised self-injury and other types of non-suicidal self-injury. Such factors include exposure to potentially traumatic events, mental health, social and sexual interactions, thoughts, emotions, motives, consequences, and how best to help.

Through this study we hope to be able to gain knowledge on how we best conceptualise and understand sexualised-self-injury, including risk factors, consequences, and the best ways to help. The main aims of the study are:

1. To advance the understanding of sexualised self-injury by generating new knowledge about its nature, risk factors, and consequences, specifically in the context of other types of non-suicidal injury.
2. To enhance conceptualisation of sexualised self-injury (how we best define and describe it)
3. To share this knowledge broadly in a way that maximises its positive impact for those struggling with the behaviour.

If you wish to take part in the study, all you have to do is click the provided link which will take you to a secure SurveyXact server you will be asked to provide an e-mail address. The e-mail address will only be used to send you a personal respondent key, allowing you to open the questionnaire. Your e-mail address will only be used to send you the respondent key, it will be deleted within 24 hours, and at no point will it be linked to the answers you provide in the questionnaire. Filling out the questionnaire takes approximately 30-50 minutes, depending on your answers, including how much information you choose to share on open-ended questions. Data is

saved continuously, whenever you are done with one set of questions and continue through the questionnaire. If you wish to take a break, you may leave the survey and return at a later time within 48 hours after first opening it, using the respondent key you received in the e-mail. Please make sure to keep the registration key confidential and don't share it with anyone. After 48 hours of first opening the questionnaire, you will no longer be able to return to it. You will not be able to return to previous pages with questions you have already answered. This is done in order to protect your data in case anyone else should get hold of your registration key within the 48-hour window. 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 who engages or has engaged in self-injury and 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 material related to self-injury.

### **What is required of you?**

All you have to do is follow this [link](#) and register your e-mail address (only used for this purpose and saved for a maximum of 24 hours) to receive a link to the questionnaire along with a confidential respondent key. You may skip any questions you prefer not to answer.

### **Will it be uncomfortable?**

Participants will be asked questions relating to self-injury, sexual behaviour and experiences, potentially traumatic experiences, mental health problems, gender identity, and sexual orientation. These questions may be uncomfortable or triggering for some. Though this may feel uncomfortable and bring back unpleasant memories, research suggests that any negative effects from being asked such questions are generally minor and short-lived. However, in order to best protect yourself, we ask that you first consider the risk that these topics may trigger an urge to self-harm and if relevant put in place safe-guards that you usually use to help you not act on such urges, should you choose to participate in this study.

If you ever struggle with suicidal thoughts or impulses, please follow this [link](#) and identify local resources for suicide prevention in your region prior to filling out the questionnaire.

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 do so, 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.

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

We collect only the data that you share with us directly in the questionnaire. Please read the legal document "Information on the processing of personal data" that you may find on this [link](#) to see a

list of all data that will be collected for the study along with information on how data will be treated and protected. Your data will be protected by the University of Southern Denmark under Danish and European Union law and will be used exclusively for research under the goals described above.

**Who is responsible for the study?**

The project is carried out by University of Southern Denmark (SDU). Research leader is Dorte M. Christiansen, associate professor, 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 or the reporting of these findings.

**Why should I participate?**

We invite you to participate because there is a need for more research on sexualised self-injury. We know very little about how it is best understood, prevented, measured, and managed. Sexualised self-injury is highly stigmatised in society, and many who engage in it think that they are the only ones to do so. The project is carried out in close collaboration with both lived experience partners and practitioners/volunteers working with vulnerable youth. We believe that research, practice-based knowledge, and lived experience of sexualised self-injury are all necessary to bring about the kind of knowledge necessary to help those who feel caught in self-destructive sexual behaviour patterns.

**Do you have any further questions?**

If you have any doubts or further questions, please feel free to contact project leader Dorte M. Christiansen via the contact information included below.

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](mailto:dpo@sdu.dk).

If you have any complaints about the study, please see [www.datatilsynet.dk](http://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.

Thank you for your time and your consideration!

Best wishes,  
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