

# GP attitude and access plays important role in young people seeking help for self-harm

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Researchers at Keele University have found that the attitudes of GPs, and having access to GPs, can play a crucial role for young people who self-harm in deciding whether to seek help.

The researchers sought to investigate the barriers which prevent young people who self-harm from seeking help, and what role GPs can play in helping them, in order to improve self-harm care and outcomes for these patients.

Dr. Faraz Mughal conducted interviews with young people, aged 19–25, who have a history of self-harm, to explore their experiences of seeking help from their GP and what factors might stop them from doing so.

The findings, published in the *British Journal of General Practice*, showed that young people might be hesitant to approach their GP for help, because of stigma or breach of confidentiality, or fear of being admitted to hospital. Additionally, their own preconceptions about visiting their GP or lack of knowledge about how to access [general practice](#) were barriers in seeking help.

The researchers say that to combat this, it is important for young people to be aware of how to access general practice, but it is also critical for GPs to listen, understand, and proactively follow up with young people in their care who self-harm, adding that continuity of GP care is important to help these patients and can reduce self-harm behavior in young people.

Self-harm is the strongest risk factor for suicide and young people who self-harm present to GPs the most often in the NHS. Perceptions of care for young people is largely unexplored, but a relationship with one GP who listens, appears to understand, and offers proactive follow-up, is an important facilitator for young people who access general practice for self-harm.

Dr. Faraz Mughal, a GP and NIHR Doctoral Fellow at Keele University, who led the study, said: "This research with young people who have harmed themselves identified several barriers for young people seeking

help but also found that GPs who listen and proactively follow-up with young people who have harmed themselves encourages future help-seeking for young people, and is good self-harm care. In the publicly-available paper we make recommendations for GPs when supporting [young people](#) who present with a history of [self-harm](#)."

**More information:** Faraz Mughal et al, Experiences of general practice care for self-harm: a qualitative study of young people's perspectives, *British Journal of General Practice* (2021). [DOI: 10.3399/BJGP.2021.0091](#)

Provided by Keele University

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