

Background

Adolescence is the period in which intentions of self-harming thoughts and behaviour are initiated and may escalate. Many difficulties during adolescence are associated with significant changes in the psychological and social development of adolescents. Self-esteem, self-control and social support seem to be important factors related to such behaviour.

Aim

The study explored the relationship between self-harming thoughts/behaviour and self-esteem, self-control and social support.

Sample

The research sample consisted of 572 early adolescents (50.1% boys, Mean age=12.49; SD=0.59) from a stratified random sample consisting of pupils of primary schools from Slovakia. The data was collected within a project aimed at school-based universal prevention.

Methods

The dependent variables consisted of answers to questions concerning intention of **thinking about harming** oneself and about **real attempt to harm oneself**. The variables were dichotomized: 0 = no self-harming behaviour occurred; 1 = self-harming behaviour occurred one or more times.

The Self-Control Scale (Finkenauer, Engels, & Baumeister, 2005) consisted of 11 items and respondents could answer on a five-point scale (1 = never, 5 = always). A higher score indicated a higher level of self-control.

Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1979) consisted of 10 items. Respondents could answer on a four-point scale. The higher score represented a higher level of self-esteem.

Support from parents, teachers, community and friends was measured by the **Resilience and Youth Development Module** (Furlong, Ritchey, & Brennan, 2009). There was a five-point answer scale. A higher score represented a higher level of support. Each domains of social support was represented by three items.

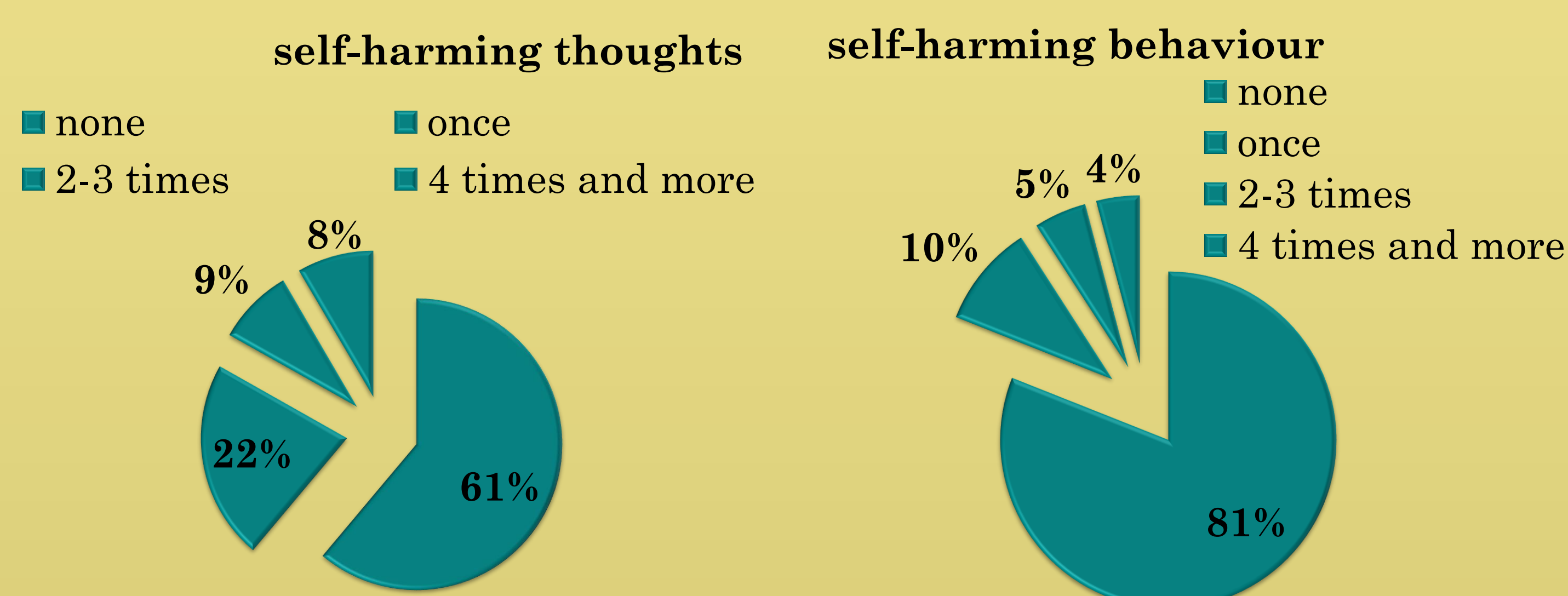
Statistical analysis

Binary logistic regression was used for data analysis. We created two models, separately for both types of self-harming behaviour. As dependent variables (dichotomized) we used thoughts of harming oneself and real attempts to harm oneself. The models consisted of seven independent variables (gender, self-control, self-esteem, supporting relations at home, at school, with some adults in community and with friends).

Findings

About 39 % of adolescents in the research sample reported self-harming thoughts and about 19 % of them reported that they had tried to harm themselves (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Percentage of reported self-harming thoughts and behaviour among Slovak adolescents



References

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Findings

The self-harming thoughts of the primary school pupils were negatively significantly associated to self-control ($p < .009$) and self-esteem ($p < .001$) (Table 1).

Table 1 Regression model for self-harming thoughts among Slovak adolescents

	B	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
				Lower	Upper
Cox & Snell R ² = .150 Nagelkerke R ² = .204					
Gender	-.073	.770	.930	.570	1.517
Self-esteem	-.190	<.001	.827	.770	.889
Self-control	-.051	.009	.950	.915	.987
SR - home	-.039	.501	.962	.858	1.078
SR - school	-.039	.469	.962	.865	1.069
SR - community	-.013	.752	.987	.910	1.071
SR- friends	.065	.196	1.067	.967	1.176
Constant	6.662	<.001	781.76		
			5		

The self-harming behaviour was found to be significantly negatively associated to self-esteem ($p < .001$), self-control ($p = .018$) and supportive relations at home ($p = .010$). There were no significant associations between self-harming behaviour and supportive relations at school, community and with friends (Table 2)..

Table 2 Regression model for self-harming behaviour among Slovak adolescents

	B	Sig.	Exp (B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
				Lower	Upper
Cox & Snell R ² = .128 Nagelkerke R ² = .207					
Gender	.237	.447	1.268	.688	2.337
Self-esteem	-.187	<.001	.830	.761	.904
Self-control	-.057	.018	.945	.902	.990
SR - home	-.170	.010	.843	.740	.961
SR - school	.051	.452	1.053	.921	1.203
SR - community	.043	.426	1.043	.940	1.159
SR- friends	-.045	.446	.956	.853	1.073
Constant	6.608	<.001	741.098		

Discussion and conclusion

Self-control and self-esteem seem to be important factors associated with thinking about harming oneself among Slovak adolescents. But real attempts of harming oneself are also significantly associated to support at home, especially from parents. The probability intention of harming oneself and attempts to harm oneself was lower in adolescents with a higher level of self-control and self-esteem. The same held for students supported by their parents more strongly. The results are consistent with some previous research (Cruz et al., 2013; Finkenauer, Engels, & Baumeister, 2005). Our data did not support the existence of gender differences in self-harming thoughts or behaviour.

The study contributed to the understanding of reasons behind self-harming behaviour among juveniles and it confirmed the importance of self-esteem, self-control and parental support in predicting such forms of behaviour among adolescents. The results strengthen our understanding of the mechanisms that lead to self-harming behaviour and this is key in prevention programmes.

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