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*Patients who self-harm: The perspectives of regional emergency department staff*

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The Emergency Department (ED) is often the first point of contact with the health-care system for people who self-harm. Such patients frequently report a negative experience when presenting to ED. Research has sought to explain this by assessing ED staffs' attitudes towards patients who self-harm. However, there is a paucity of research focused on rural staff attitudes.

The aim of this project was to explore rural Western Australian ED staffs'; (1) workplace experiences with patients who present to ED with self-harm, (2) attitudes towards patients who self-harm, and (3) opinions about rural-specific issues relating to self-harm. An exploratory component explored ED staff's ideas about the internet's role in patient self-harm.

A sample of 56 ED staff in rural Western Australia completed a survey that examined various aspects about self-harm including workplace experiences with patients who self-harm, self-harm in rural areas, and attitudes towards patients who self-harm.

The study found that ED staff were generally moderate in their attitudes towards self-harm and towards the perceived influence of the internet on self-harm. Data analysis demonstrated that various staff, patient, and workplace characteristics did not have a significant impact on attitudes or perceptions about self-harm. However, ED staff identified concerns about regional-specific issues, including insufficient services. The results of the current study are positive in that even though rural ED staff are faced with unique challenges when working with patients who self-harm, their attitudes remain moderate and they have a strong desire to receive training in managing patients who self-harm.

This study also promotes the idea of including a new component in self-harm training programs; education around how the internet can be considered both a protective and perpetuating factor for self-harm. This direction would allow the synthesis of existing and new research in the self-harm field, and encourage ED staff to utilise different avenues for assisting patients presenting with self-harm.

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