
Abstract

Understanding adolescents' perceptions of their friends' self-harm behaviors and the changes that occur within their relationships as a result of these behaviors

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This study aimed to examine the relationship between people who engage in self-harm and their friends, including the transformations in their friendship, friends' sentiments on self-harm behaviors, and treatment of those who engage in it. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 college students who reported having at least one friend who engaged in self-harm behaviors. Thereafter, the results were analyzed using modified grounded theory approach. The findings reveal "routes to understanding self-harm from multiple perspectives" and "routes to viewing self-harm as an appealing act." In the first route, derivation to "the communicable route of self-harm" was also observed. The results indicate that friends support those who engage in self-harm by understanding and acknowledging their self-harm. They act as intermediaries to professional organizations in their supportive role. However, there is also a risk of spreading self-harm within friend groups and an appealing perception of self-harm may result in a hurtful experience for the person engaged in self-harm. Finally, methods of support were discussed.

Keywords: self-harm, friends, school, contagion, transformational process
