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Are traumatic dental injuries an indicator of adolescents' non-suicidal self-injury behaviour?

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Background:

Although some studies have shown that adolescents with problem behaviour are more likely to experience traumatic dental injuries (TDIs), it is still unknown if TDIs are a manifestation of non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) behaviour.

Objectives:

To explore whether there is an association between lifetime history of NSSI behaviour and TDIs in 15-16-year-old adolescents.

Methods:

This study used cross-sectional data from Phase III of the Research with East London Adolescents Community Health Survey (RELACHS), a longitudinal study of a representative, ethnically diverse sample of secondary schools in East London. Lifetime history of NSSI was assessed by asking adolescents whether they have ever deliberately taken an overdose or tried to harm themselves in some other way. TDIs were determined from dental examination conducted by two trained examiners. Survey logistic regression was used to test the association between lifetime history of NSSI and TDI adjusting for confounders (sex, age, ethnicity, parental unemployment, lip coverage and overjet).

Results:

A total of 1453 adolescents were invited to participate in RELACHS phase III, of whom 1030 (71%) completed the questionnaire, 975 (67%) were dentally examined and 750 (55% female) had complete data on NSSI, TDIs and confounders. The prevalence of NSSI and TDIs was 12.8% and 16.5%, respectively. The association between history of NSSI and TDIs was not statistically significant, with an odds ratio of 1.02 (95% CI: 0.57-1.85) after adjustment for potential confounders.

Conclusion:

This study provided no support for an association between lifetime history of NSSI and TDIs among adolescents.

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