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Beyond medicalization: Self-injuring acts revisited

During the last decades self-injuring acts, the intentional destruction of one's own body tissue without suicidal intent, have been reported as a wide-spread phenomenon among adolescents and young adults in the community. With few exceptions, scientific literature describes and explains self-injuring acts as an outcome of individual psychiatric or psychological characteristics and is concentrated on finding deviant intrapersonal patterns, gender differences, psychopathology, and emotional dissimilarities between those who self-injure and those who do not. However, the high prevalence of self-injuring acts in the community indicates the medical view to be an insufficient explanatory model that hampers the understanding of this multifaceted phenomenon. This presentation describes and challenges the medicalization of self-injuring acts, and argues a need to move research out of the medical paradigm by explicitly exploring the impact of social, cultural, structural and gendered factors on self-injuring acts. Advancement in research requires an approach beyond the limits of the medical perspective. In order to create a better understanding and a more nuanced view on this wide-spread social phenomenon, social scientific research needs to challenge the medical view and the medicalization of self-injuring acts.

Biography

Inger Ekman is a Social Worker with a Master's degree in Social Sciences. She lectures in Social Work and is also pursuing her Doctoral studies from the Department of Social Work and from the Graduate School of Gender Research, Umea University, Sweden.

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