Assessing the risk of self-harm in an adult offender population: an incidence cohort study

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Notes: The correlation matrix is available following application to the authors. This provides the bivariate correlations for the entire data set.

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Plain English summary

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Some people engage in what is called deliberate self-harm. They may cut or burn themselves, or engage in reckless activities with the intention of hurting themselves. Self-harm is common in our prisons, and the rising number of prisoners who engaged in self-harm behaviours was a cause for concern, so the prison service introduced a process that was designed to improve the care of those at risk of self-harm. However, the process had no method by which a prisoner could be assessed for risk, and the current project set out to see if one or more questionnaires could be used for such a purpose.

In total, 450 prisoners took part in the study and five questionnaires were administered to each participant in a single interview. The prisoners were followed up for a period of 6 months, or until their release, and the number of self-harm events recorded. Just over one-quarter engaged in one or more self-harm behaviours during the follow-up period. Although all the questionnaires were shown to be reasonably robust for use in a prison setting, none was predictive of future self-harm. However, some of their individual questions, along with other factors such as alcohol dependency, were found to be predictive, and so individual male and female screening instruments were constructed from the questions. These turned out to be very good at predicting those who would not self-harm and may be useful for guiding interventions for those at risk of future self-harm.
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This report

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