The SASH (Social Aspects of Self-Harm, including drug and alcohol use) research project was led by Amy Chandler at The University of Edinburgh and funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust Fund.

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What is self-harm?
• Self-cutting.
• Burning your skin.
• Having negative thoughts about yourself.
• Bullying yourself online.
• Hitting yourself, either punching or with an object (wall, hammer...).
• Drinking too much alcohol (and being sick).
• Taking too many tablets (an overdose).

What helps young people who have self-harmed?
• Understanding.
• Access to safe information about how to care for their injuries themselves.
• Not being judged.
• Being listened to, and taken seriously.
• Having someone to talk to.

Who took part?
89 young people who had self-harmed took part in the research
33 additional young people* in Edinburgh took part in group discussions
66% girls took part
27% boys took part
7% genderfluid/didn’t say

*These young people were not asked about their own experiences with self-harm, drug or alcohol use.

For more information on the study and findings, check out: http://sashresearchproject.wordpress.com

This leaflet is based on research with 122 young people aged 13+

ADDICTED TO HURTING YOURSELF? SELF-HARM, ALCOHOL AND DRUG-USE
Who self-harms?
There are some stereotypes about who self-harms, especially the idea that people who self-harm are either a) goths or emos; b) girls.
- Young people in the study said that there were no ‘typical’ people who self-harmed.
- Studies have found that at least a quarter of people who say they self-harm are boys.
- The idea that self-harm is a ‘girl thing’ might make boys less likely to say they self-harm, even if they do.

Is self-harm mostly about attention seeking?
No. Most people who self-harm say that they keep it hidden and private. Attention-seeking is a very negative phrase, that suggests any attention given is not deserved.
- Young people talked about self-harm that was seen by others (especially online) as being more likely to be ‘attention-seeking’.
- The two ideas that a) self-harm that is visible is attention-seeking, and b) self-harm is mostly private and hidden, may make it very difficult for young people who self-harm to tell others, or talk about it.

Is alcohol and drug use like self-harm?
Yes
“Makes you forget […] You feel like it’s something you can go back to when things go bad”  Lee, 16
“Can [all] harm you seriously the more you do it [and can] destroy your body” Louise, 15
“They can all start out as an experiment and end in addiction” Leon, 15

No
“Well, you don’t celebrate a marriage by cutting yourself” Cody, 16
“The price [is different]. Self-harm is free and can use things you already have. Alcohol costs a bit but is easy to get. Drugs cost a lot if you want anything decent” Matt, 16
“Self-harm is on your body so it’s a lot harder to hide” Jamelia, 15

Why do people self-harm?
Reasons young people gave for self-harm:
- It helps with difficult emotions – anger, frustration, sadness, hatred.
- It helps people to ‘feel something’ when they feel empty.
- It helps people feel better, when they feel bad.
- It can show others that a person feels bad.
- It is related to depression, anxiety and other mental health problems.

Sidney, 15
“I tried healthier methods of releasing my built-up emotions but they would never work. At first I did it because I was extremely sad but there was also a lot of curiosity. None of my friends helped me when I told them of my problems, so only I could help myself. Now I do it whenever I get the chance, am angry, excited, bored stressed, or sad”

Aaron, 17
“Boys don’t talk about it, or show it much, like, or are as open to, like, self-harm. They won’t tell anyone or show anyone. They’ll deny it if they’re asked”

Christy, 15
“There’s a really fine line in people thinking that seeking help and seeking attention, there’s a lot of conflict about that kind of stuff, like if you see someone who self-harmed coming out and speaking about it, then people either go on the seeking help side, or the seeking attention side. People don’t really know the difference”

Paula, 16
“I felt like no one could see that I was really truly falling apart and no one was offering help, and if I self-harmed they would get that message”

Gita, 14
“I don’t feel happy anymore, nor sad, just empty. When I break the skin, it fills me with this exciting rush and distracts my mind”