

Hi, I would like to make a submission to the "*Intentional self-harm and suicidal behaviour in children*" which was advertised on your website <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/intentional-self-harm-and-suicidal-behaviour-children>.

Paper submission: National Children's Commissioner examines intentional self harm and suicidal behaviour in children

This paper will investigate the cause why children and youth engage in self-harm and suicidal behaviour and suggest a program that may tackle this problem. I'm writing this from a first person perspective. The first time I hurt myself was around aged 10. I drank bleach and used a cutter to cut my wrist and arm. Self-cut was very common among my peers at school and in my culture (Hong Kong). I grew up without a father. And my mother was constantly absent from my life because she was away working 6 days a week. I only got to see her once a week on Sundays. But she was abusive (psychologically) and constantly made me feel I'm worthless, unloved and dirty (she never touch me and when she did by accident, she would quickly wash her hands and stare at me with disgust). The people I lived and grew up with, were my 2 years older sister, and a housekeeper from mainland. The relationship between us was not great. Lack of a good role model and someone who can talk to me and understand me, I turned to self harm as a way to relieve pain. I have seriously thought about ending my sorrow life. Being a very shy girl, I have never been a centre of attention either in school or socially. I had few close friends in high school. They also cut their arms. And one of them was even more engaged in this behaviour.

One time, I had an overdose of prescription drugs at 13 because of fear of living with my mother and seeing her again and again. I went unconscious for few days and stayed in hospital. Some of my memory was lost and I couldn't recall small details of what/how many drugs I took and how I ended up where I was found. I survived.

After my mum died suddenly from stroke when I was 15, my already left-home sister moved back in. We didn't get along (and have never did throughout childhood). There was a big fight one night. I ran to our balcony of 35th floor and threatened to jump. I stayed in the tiny 2sqms balcony overnight and couldn't take the courage to jump. I survived and I never engaged in any other suicidal behaviour since then. Because I moved out from my sister and later came to Australia by myself when I was 19. I had my ups and downs for the last 15 years. I never thought about hurting myself again. My life is colourful now. I went to study in university and got 2 degrees. I travelled around the world and backpacked to 15 countries. I experienced many intimate relationships and learnt from each person who came to my life. I smoked, drank alcohol and took recreational drugs. And now I'm a non smoker and in love with my sports (tennis, swimming, etc). I live an active life and am content with myself. I have a full time job. Not many but few good friends. This has been a long and difficult journey to end up where I am now.

To sum up, I think the main reason contributing to self-harm behaviour in children is the lack of good role model at home or someone close, to open up with. Peer pressure is another one. Children are vulnerable and can easily be influenced by peers. So when others are hurting themselves, one may follow. They are not mature enough to understand and question why they do it and what they want to achieve from doing it. They don't have tools to deal with life issues so they turn to this self harm behaviour to distraught themselves and numb their pain.

Taking a prevention measure would always help, such as providing more support both financially/socially to disadvantaged families with kids. An intervention program may help tackling the self harm problem such as a mentoring program. A mentor* can be a good role model and support the child's development. But again, every child attempted self-harm/suicide has different reasons to why they do it. It's important to investigate the underlying issues before an effective program can be designed and developed. A multifaceted program may be needed – a campaign to raise awareness – a support mechanism to help those affected.

*Mentor - someone may have been through self harming experiences to match with a child who is going through a similar situation.

Best regards,