

## 7. Self-harm

Self-harm is the term used to describe purposely self-inflicted injury (WHO, 1977; WHO, 1992). This category includes suicide attempts that did not result in death and self-maiming attempts. WHO classifies self-harm according to the method used: hanging, strangulation or suffocation, poisoning by overdose, shooting by firearm, jumping from a high place, jumping or lying in front of a moving object, near-drowning and using a sharp or blunt object. Only people aged 10 years or older are included in the analyses for this section.

In NSW, suicide was the leading cause of injury-related death in NSW during 1998-2002, with 3,822 deaths, giving a mortality rate of 11.7 per 100,000 population (Schmertmann et al, 2004). The lifetime cost of fatal and attempted self-harm in NSW has been estimated at \$588 million—\$25 million in direct costs and \$563 million in mortality and morbidity costs (Potter-Forbes & Aisbett, 2003).

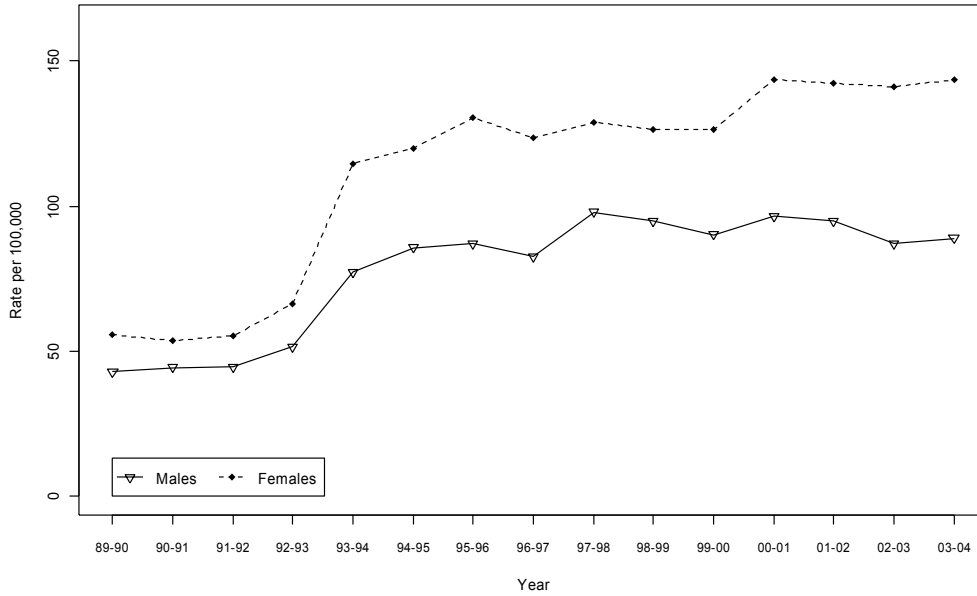
Hospitalisation data for self-harm were used to describe the profile of self-harm-related injuries of NSW residents. Hospitalisation data during 1999–2000 to 2003–2004 were used for the majority of the analyses, except for the trend analyses, which used data from 1989–1990 to 2003–2004.

Self-harm was the fourth leading cause of injury hospitalisation during the period 1999–2000 to 2003–2004, and accounted for 6.5% of all injury hospitalisations (Table 3). During this period, there were 32,582 hospitalisations for self-harm, at a rate of 115.1 per 100,000 population aged 10 years or older.

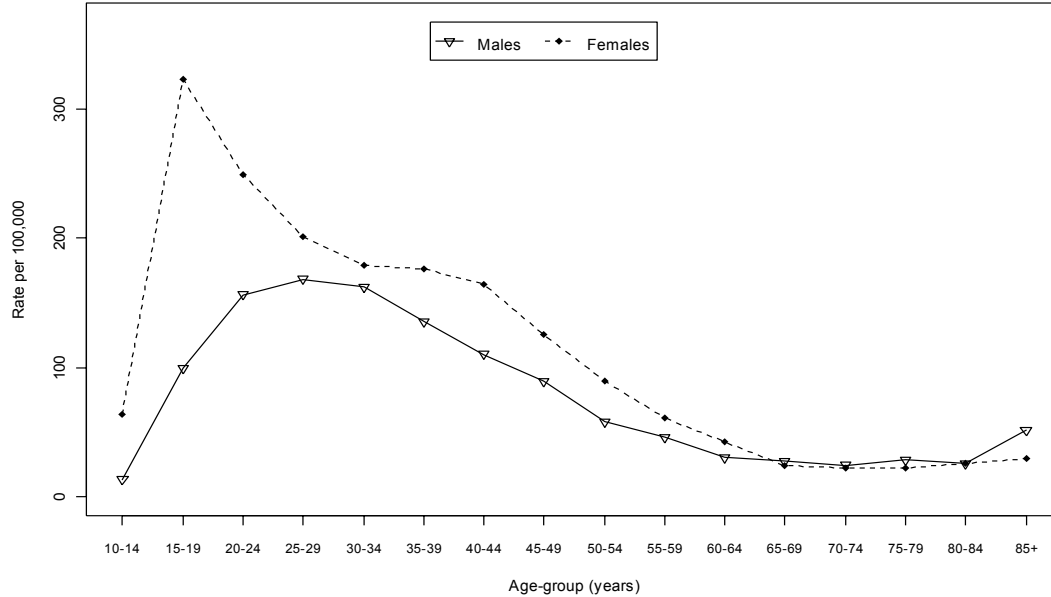
Hospitalisation rates for self-harm were higher for females than for males for the period 1989–1990 to 2003–2004 (Figure 9). The rate of self-harm-related hospitalisation increased significantly by 5.9% per year (95% confidence interval for the increase: 5.2% to 6.6%) from 1989–1990 to 2003–2004.

For females, age-specific hospitalisation rates for self-harm for the period 1999–2000 to 2003–2004 were highest in those aged 15-19 and 20–24 years. In males, age-specific hospitalisation rates were highest in those aged 20–24, 25–29, and 30-34 years (Figure 10). The overall hospitalisation rate was about 53% higher for females than for males.

**Figure 9. Hospitalisation rate for injury due to self-harm by sex, NSW 1989–1990 to 2003–2004**



**Figure 10. Age-specific hospitalisation rate for self-harm by sex, NSW, 1999–2000 to 2003–2004**



Poisoning and use of a sharp or blunt object were the most commonly used methods of self-harm. Approximately 85% of all hospitalisations due to self-harm were caused by poisoning. The hospitalisation rate for females for self-harm by poisoning was about 74% higher than the rate for males. The overall hospitalisation rate for females was about 53% higher for females than for males (Table 10).

Table 11 shows the number of hospitalisations due to self-harm by age group for the period 1999–2000 to 2003–2004. In all age groups, poisoning was the most common method causing hospitalisation, followed by use of a sharp or blunt object.

**Table 10. Injury hospitalisations by method of self-harm, NSW, number, rate and CI, 1999–2000 to 2003–2004**

Self-harm method	All Persons			Male			Female		
	N	Rate <sup>1</sup>	95%CI <sup>2</sup>	N	Rate <sup>1</sup>	95%CI <sup>2</sup>	N	Rate <sup>1</sup>	95%CI <sup>2</sup>
Poisoning	27,758	98.1	(96.9,99.2)	10,148	71.7	(70.3,73.1)	17,609	125.1	(123.3,127.0)
Sharp or blunt object	3,585	12.7	(12.3,13.1)	1,942	13.7	(13.1,14.4)	1,644	11.7	(11.1,12.3)
Suffocation	433	1.5	(1.4,1.7)	321	2.3	(2.0,2.5)	112	0.8	(0.7,1.0)
Jumping	148	0.5	(0.4,0.6)	91	0.6	(0.5,0.8)	56	0.4	(0.3,0.5)
Firearm	67	0.2	(0.2,0.3)	59	0.4	(0.3,0.6)	8	0.1	(0.0,0.1)
Jumping/ lying moving object	51	0.2	(0.1,0.2)	34	0.2	(0.2,0.3)	17	0.1	(0.1,0.2)
Near -drowning	14	0.0	(0.0,0.1)	8	0.1	(0.0,0.1)	6	0.0	(0.0,0.1)
Other	526	1.9	(1.7,2.0)	338	2.4	(2.1,2.7)	188	1.3	(1.1,1.5)
All <sup>3</sup>	32,582	115.1	(113.9,116.4)	12,941	91.5	(89.9,93.1)	19,640	139.6	(137.6,141.5)

<sup>1</sup> Age-adjusted rate per 100,000 population.

<sup>2</sup> 95% confidence interval.

<sup>3</sup> The number of NSW residents hospitalised interstate during 2003–2004 was imputed and as a result the sum of submechanisms may not equal the total.

## SUMMARY

Self-harm was the fourth leading cause of injury-related hospitalisation involving NSW residents between 1999–2000 and 2003–2004, accounting for 6.5% of all injury-related hospitalisations. The yearly hospitalisation rate for self-harm-related injuries was estimated to have increased significantly by 5.9% per year during 1989–1990 to 2003–2004.

In 2003–2004, there were 6,661 hospitalisations of NSW residents following a self-harm attempt, giving a hospitalisation rate of 115.9 per 100,000 population aged 10 years or older. More than three-quarters of those hospitalised following an attempt at self-harm (76.1%) were aged 15–44 years.

Poisoning and use of a sharp or blunt object were the most commonly used methods of self-harm that led to a hospitalisation. Females had a 53% higher hospitalisation rate for self-harm than males.

**Table 11. Number of hospitalisations for self-harm<sup>1</sup> by age group and cause, NSW, 1999–2000 to 2003–2004**

Rank	Age group							Total
	10–14	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+	
1	Poisoning 716	Poisoning 7,621	Poisoning 7,157	Poisoning 6,386	Poisoning 3,609	Poisoning 1,318	Poisoning 951	Poisoning 27,758
2	Sharp or blunt object 101	Sharp or blunt object 1,109	Sharp or blunt object 1,106	Sharp or blunt object 727	Sharp or blunt object 323	Sharp or blunt object 110	Sharp or blunt object 110	Sharp or blunt object 3,585
3	Suffocation 16	Suffocation 146	Suffocation 139	Suffocation 77	Suffocation 29	Firearm 11	Firearm 21	Suffocation 433
4	Jumping/ lying moving object #	Jumping 46	Jumping 47	Jumping 32	Firearm 12	Suffocation 10	Suffocation 17	Jumping 148
5	Firearm #	Jumping/ lying moving object #	Jumping/ lying moving object 17	Jumping/ lying moving object 15	Jumping 9	Jumping #	Jumping 9	Firearm 67
6	-	Firearm #	Firearm 9	Firearm 8	Jumping/ lying moving object #	Drowning #	Drowning #	Jumping/ lying moving object 51
7		Drowning #	Drowning #	Drowning #	Drowning #	-	-	Drowning 14
	Other 17	Other 155	Other 177	Other 96	Other 47	Other 15	Other 19	Other 526

<sup>1</sup> # Cell sizes represent fewer than five hospitalisations or data have been removed to prevent identification of cell sizes less than five.