

AGE AND GENDER EFFECTS ON NON-SUICIDAL SELF-INJURY, AND THEIR INTERPLAY WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

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INTRODUCTION

- Non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) refers to the act of 'direct, deliberate destruction of one's own body tissue in the absence of the intent to die'
- Lifetime prevalence is 18-25%
- NSSI is commonly perceived to be more common in females
- There is no single study which measures NSSI levels at all ages from early adolescence to adulthood; and all studies vary in methodology and sampling frame.
- NSSI is more common in people with high levels of psychological distress: moderation vs mediation models.

INTRODUCTION

- This study set out to test the interplay between gender, age and psychological distress on a community sample designed to recruit large numbers of people across its age range (14-25) and with equal numbers of males and females. We tested the following hypotheses:
 - (1) NSSI is more common in females and peaks in mid-adolescence
 - (2) Psychological distress is associated with engagement in NSSI
 - (3) The age and gender patterns in NSSI would be partly explained by (i) different levels of psychological distress (mediation), and/or (ii) differential effects on whether people choose to engage in NSSI when distressed (moderation).

METHODS

- This study was conducted within the Neuroscience in Psychiatry Network (NSPN) 2400 cohort
- The aim was to have 200 participants in each of the ten gender-age bins (14/15, 16/17, 18/19, 20/21, 22/23/24), a target that was exceeded for all bins.
- NSSI was measured using a binary self-report question within a questionnaire assessing an individual's risk taking behaviour.
- A bifactor model with a general distress factor was used, which explained a large proportion of the variance for most items

RESULTS

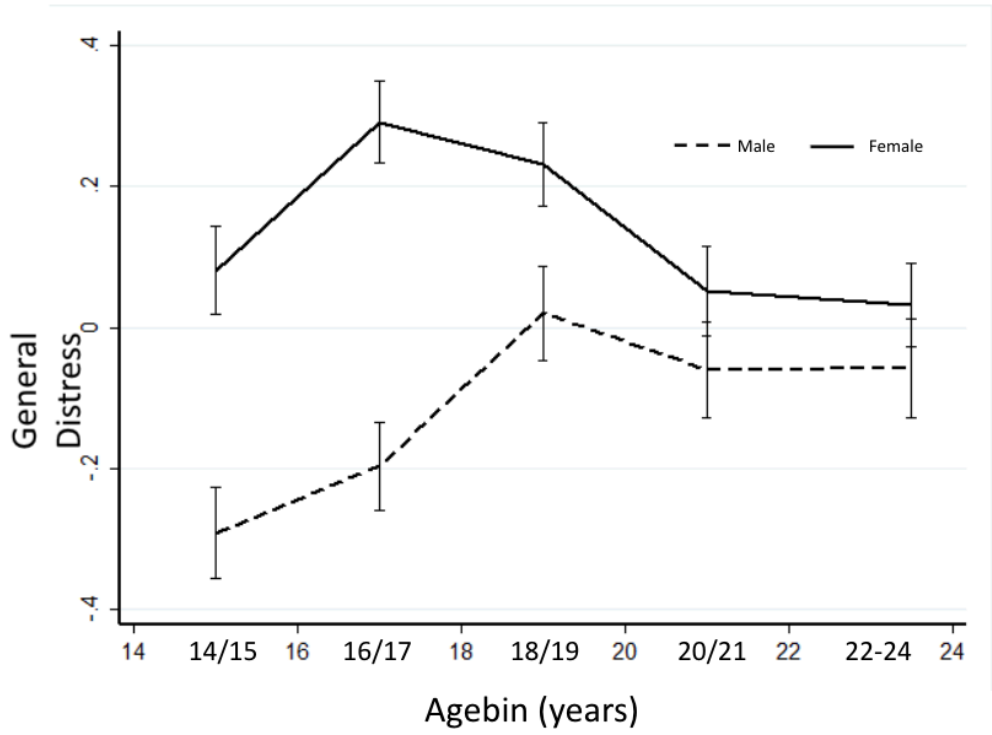


Figure 2. Mean General Distress, by Age and Gender. Note: error bars represent standard errors of the mean

- There was a significant quadratic interaction between age and gender on last month NSSI prevalence ($p = 0.025$)
- NSSI was more common in females ages 16-19, but there were no significant gender differences at younger/older ages.

RESULTS

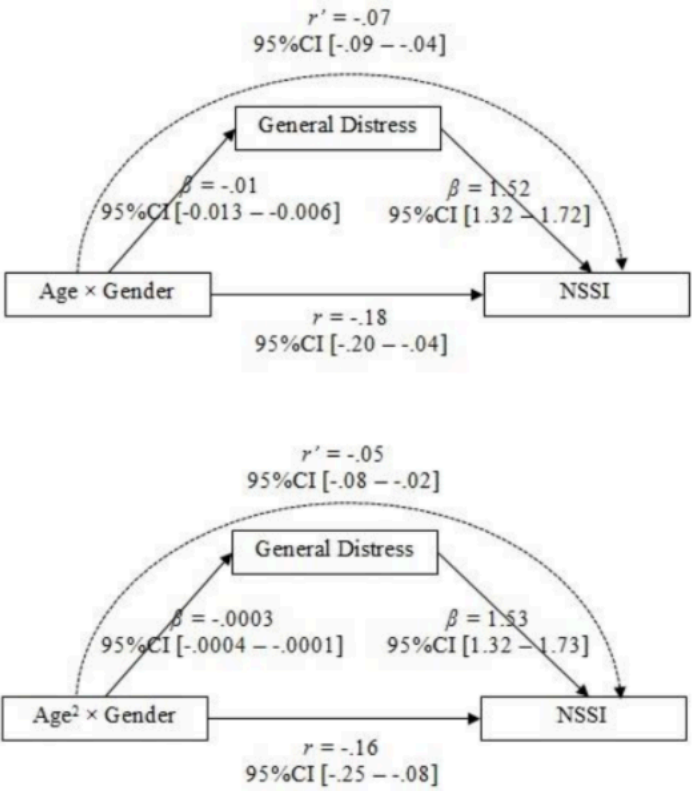


Figure 3. Mediation by general distress on the association between age/gender and NSSI
 Note: (r indicates direct effect, r' indirect effect).

- General distress partially mediated the effects of age and gender on NSSI.
- The association between general distress and NSSI was not significantly moderated by age, gender nor their interactions.

DISCUSSION

- Gender difference in NSSI is not a static gap, but evolves across time, widening in mid-adolescence and disappearing by early adulthood.
- Part of the reason for that gender gap being present at those ages is the increased levels of distress in young women at those ages.
- There was no evidence that the effects of general distress on NSSI differed by age/gender.