

20-year trends in depression and anxiety in England

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Background

- Large increases in rates of psychosocial disorders of youth over recent decades
- Conflicting evidence about trends in childhood depression
- Methodological problems make it very difficult to reach firm conclusions
- Few studies have used comparable measures and samples across time

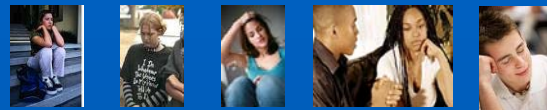
Specific research questions

- Have adolescent emotional problems become more common in the UK?
- Do trends vary by gender, family type or income?
- Do trends vary according to problem severity?
- Do trends vary by type of symptom?

Aim

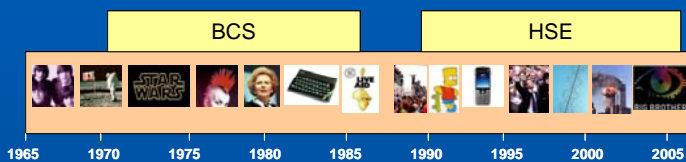
The main aim was to assess trends in adolescent emotional problems using:

- repeat nationally representative samples
- multi-measure, multi-informant assessments of internalising problems
- the same instruments in both studies
- prior childhood data to correct for non-response in both studies



Samples

- **BCS (1986)**: 16-year follow up of 1970 British Cohort Study: 4,749 adolescents and 7,466 parents
- **HSE (2006)**: 16/17-year follow up of 2002/3 Health Surveys for England: 709 adolescents and their parents



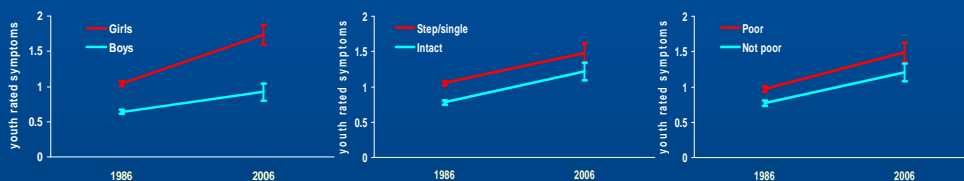
Measures

- General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12)
Malaise Inventory (adapted)
Rutter-A scale (parent report)
- Symptoms coded as present if rated "most of the time" (Malaise) or "much more than usual" (GHQ12) or "certainly applies" (Rutter-A)
- Analyses tested trends in total youth and parent symptom counts, and for individual symptoms

Results

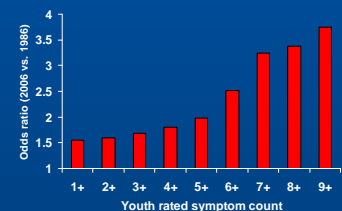
1. Trends in emotional problem scores by gender, family type, and poverty

There was a significant increase in teenagers' total emotional problem scores between 1986 and 2006 ($p < .001$; overall ES = .27). As shown, these trends affected boys and girls, and children from different family groups similarly.



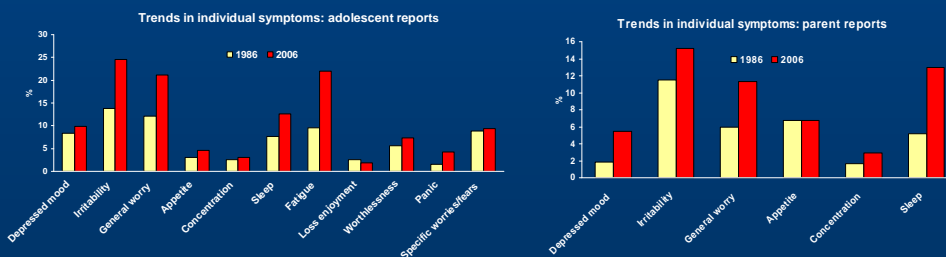
2. Do trends vary by problem severity?

Cohort differences became more marked with increasing problem severity.



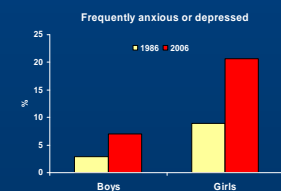
3. Trends in individual symptoms

There were significant increases in rates of self-reported irritability, general worry, sleep disturbance, fatigue and panic (all $p < .005$), and parent-reported depressed mood, irritability, general worry, and sleep disturbance (all $p < .025$).



4. Frequency of anxiety/depression

More young people in 2006 reported often feeling anxious or depressed ($p < .001$).



Main findings

- Today's adolescents experience considerably elevated rates of internalising problems
- Similar trends were found for boys and girls and for young people from different socio-demographic backgrounds
- Cohort differences became more marked with increasing severity of emotional problems
- The largest increases have occurred in rates of worry, irritability, fatigue, and sleep disturbance.
- Young people also reported more frequent feelings of anxiety or depression

Future directions

- The YouthTrends study includes comparable data on adolescent family life, peers, substance use, school experiences and attitudes. Next we will test whether changes in these factors account for trends in mental health.