

Risk and Protective Factors for Mental Health in Children and Young Adults

DATE

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VENUE

Online Launch

AUTHORS

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Background

- Approx. half of mental health problems emerge before the age of 14 (Kessler et al., 2017)
- Child and adolescent mental health problems can have lasting effects on later-life outcomes (Attanasio et al., 2020; Currie et al., 2010; Goodman et al., 2011)
- But important also to focus on current mental health and wellbeing, rather than simply as a predictor of future life chances
- Concern about increases in depression and anxiety among young people (Dooley et al., 2019)
- Recent policy focus on protective, as well as risk, factors for mental health and wellbeing

Objectives of this study

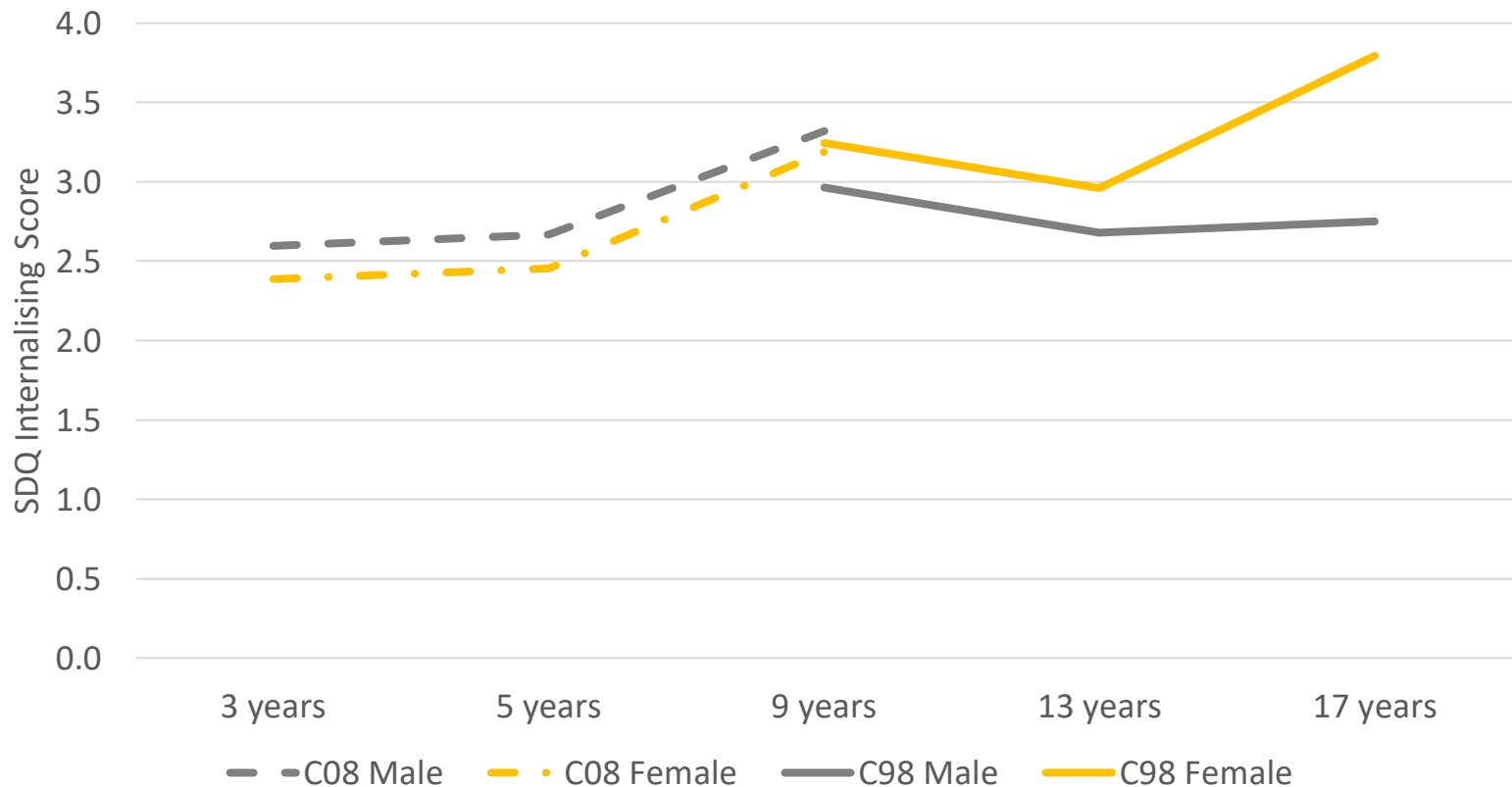
- Examine how negative as well as positive dimensions of mental health and wellbeing vary across children and young people
 - Negative - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) internalising problems score
 - Positive - Life satisfaction
- Examine the influence of demographic, SES, family, peer and teacher relationships on mental health and wellbeing

Data

- Use data from both cohorts of Growing up in Ireland
 - '08 – surveyed at age 9 in 2017/2018 (wave 5)
 - '98 – surveyed at age 17 in 2015/2016 (wave 3)
- Focus today on SDQ internalising problems
 - Sum of scores from SDQ subscales (emotional and peer problems)
 - Score ranges from 0-20
 - Higher score indicative of greater difficulties

SDQ Internalising Difficulties

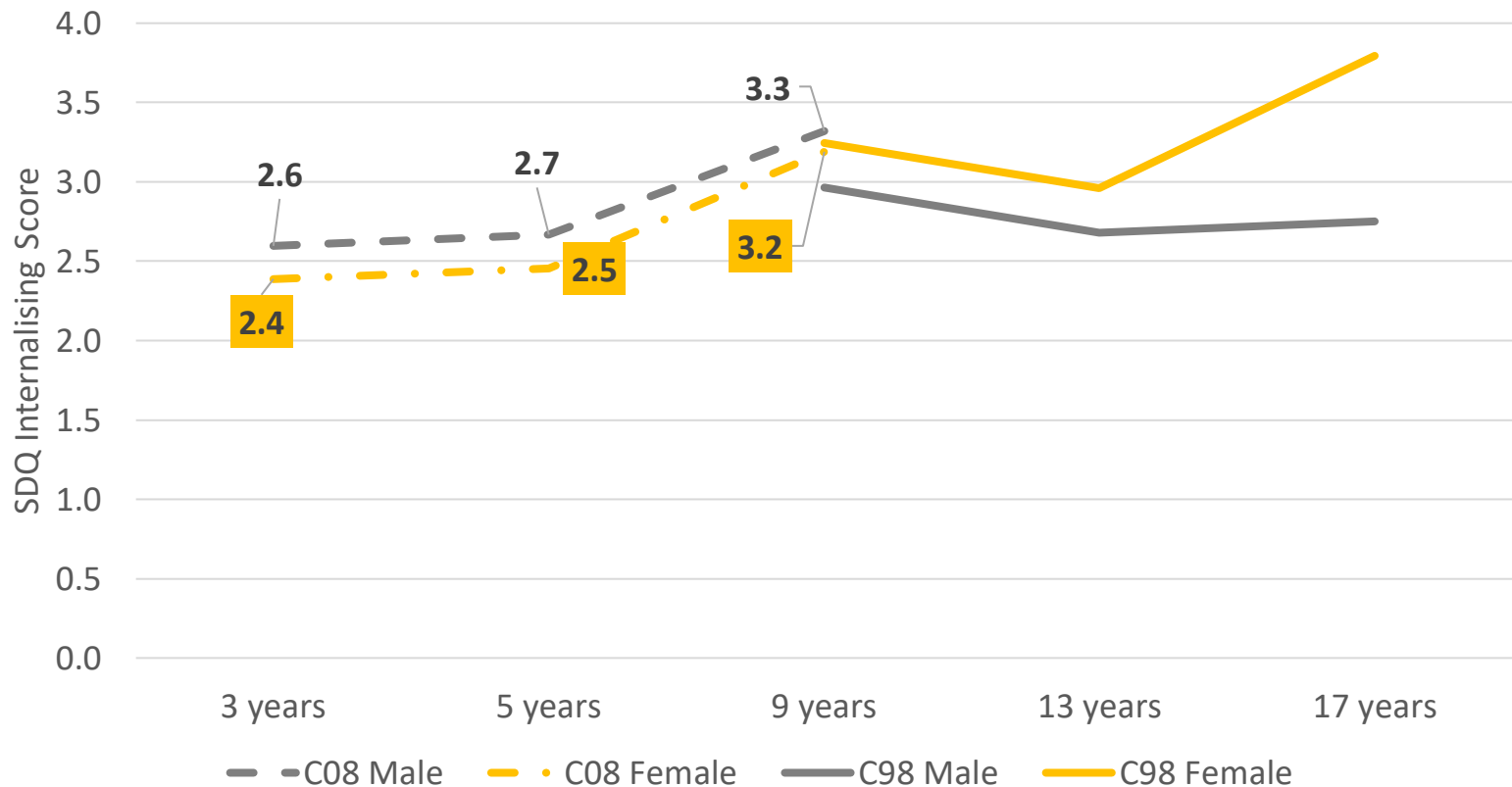
From age 3 to 9 ('08 cohort), age 9 to 17 ('98 cohort)



Mean scores: C08 age 9 = 3.3; C98 age 17 = 3.4

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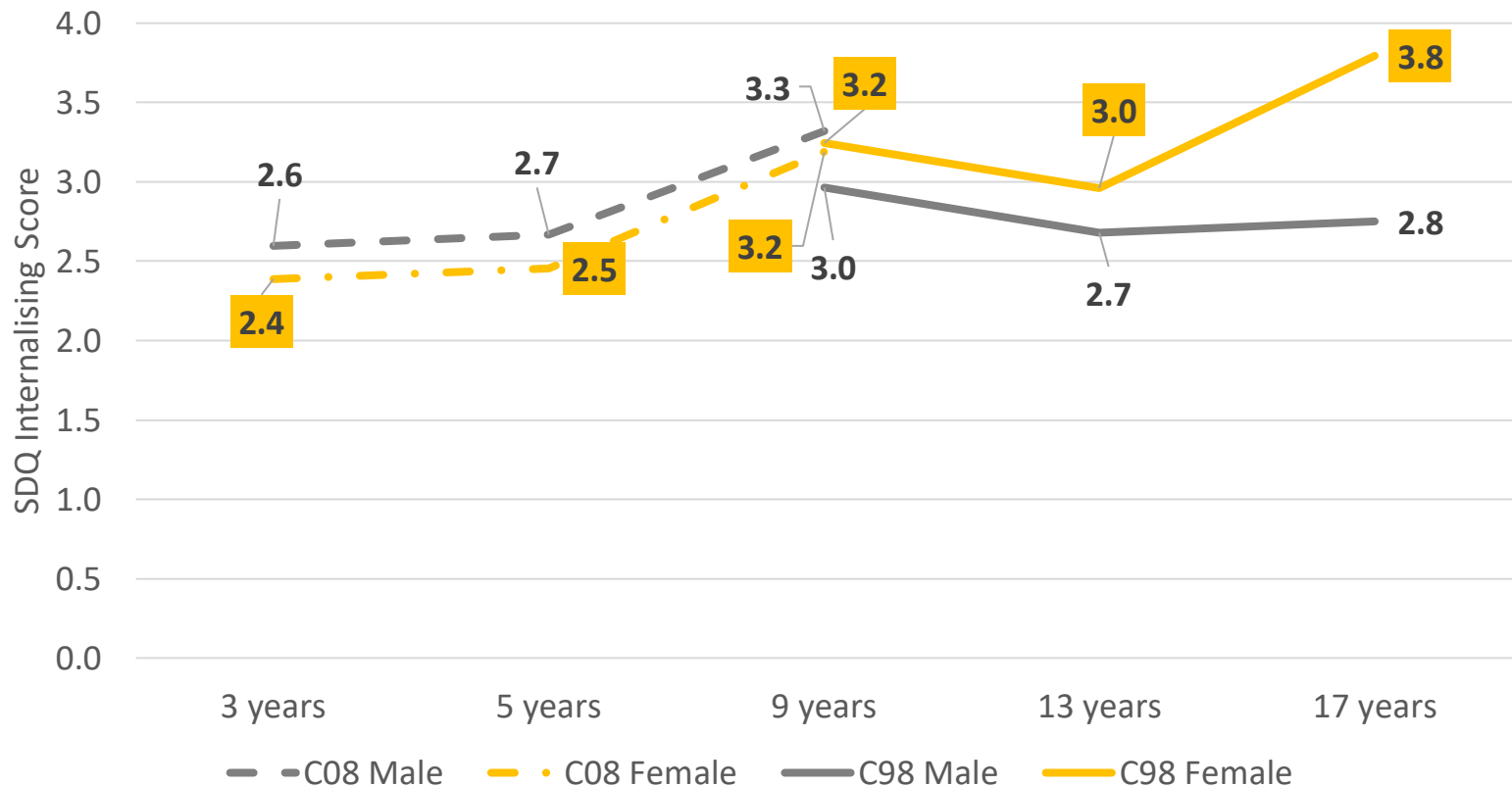
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SDQ Internalising Difficulties

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Multivariate models ('08 cohort @ age 9)

Demographics, SES

	Marginal Effects
Gender	ns
School stage	ns
Urban/rural area	ns
Chronic illness	+
PCG migrant	-
Lone parent	+
PCG education	-
Difficulty making ends meet	+
Change in circumstances since last wave	ns

ns = non-significant; other results significant at 5% level

Multivariate models ('08 cohort @ age 9)

Family, peer, teacher/school relationships

	Marginal Effects
Number close friends	-
Bullied in last year	+
Plays sport	-
Screen time	ns
Family activities (evening meal, library, sport, etc.)	ns
Parent – closeness	-
Parent – conflict	+
Parenting style (hostile)	+
Maternal depression	+
Teacher – closeness	ns
Teacher – conflict	ns

ns = non-significant; other results significant at 5% level

Multivariate models ('98 cohort @ age 17)

Demographics, SES

	Males	Females
PCG education	-	-
Difficulty making ends meet	+	+
Lone parent family/separation	+	+
Chronic illness	+	+
Special educational need	+	+
PCG migrant	ns	ns
Rural area	-	ns
School stage	+ (LC)	+ (LC)

ns = non-significant; other results significant at 5% level

Multivariate models ('98 cohort @ age 17)

Family relationships

	Males	Females
Closeness with mother	ns	+
Closeness with father	ns	ns
Conflict with mother	+	+
Conflict with father	ns	ns
Disclosure to parent(s)	-	-
Maternal depression	+	+
Paternal depression	ns	ns

ns = non-significant; other results significant at 5% level

Multivariate models ('98 cohort @ age 17)

Peer relationships and activities

	Males	Females
Safe play for teenagers to hang around/ facilities	ns/-	-/-
Was bullied at 13	+	+
No. friends at 17	-	-
Trust in friends at 17	ns	-
Alienation from friends at 17	+	+
Boy/girlfriend	ns	ns
Broke up with boy/girlfriend	+	+
Sports at 17	--	-
Cultural activities at 17	ns	ns

ns = non-significant; other results significant at 5% level

Multivariate models ('98 cohort @ age 17)

Teacher/school relationships

	Males	Females
Verbal reasoning test score	ns	ns
Positive interaction with teachers at 17	-	-
Negative interaction with teachers at 17	-	-
No. higher level Leaving Cert subjects	-	--
Disliked school	+	+
Regretted subject choice	ns	+
Adult to talk to	ns	-

ns = non-significant; other results significant at 5% level

Summary

- Significant gender gap in SDQ internalising problems opens up in adolescence
- Family SES and experience of financial strain are consistent risk factors
- Children and adolescents from lone parent families a vulnerable group
- Chronic illness and SEN also emerge as risk factors
- Intergenerational persistence
- Protective effect of positive parent, peer and teacher relationships

Policy Implications

- Gender gap
 - Highlights importance of wellbeing initiatives in schools
- Family financial strain
 - Highlights importance of poverty reduction policies
- Importance of network of relationships
 - Increasing role for peers in adolescence and young adulthood
- Impact of COVID-19
 - CSO data on effects of school closures indicate parental concerns around social development as well as learning
 - GUI COVID-19 surveys show large declines in wellbeing of children, parents and young people
 - forthcoming report in early 2022 on '98 Cohort

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Extra Slides

Previous Literature (1)

- SES
 - Strength of association varies by age, sex and MH indicator (Reiss, 2013)
 - Changes in economic circumstances associated with poorer outcomes (Golberstein et al., 2019; Watson et al., 2016)
- Gender
 - Males tend to be more satisfied with their lives than females (particularly in adolescence) (Zaborskis et al., 2018)
 - No gender difference in SDQ internalising in middle childhood, but gap opens up in adolescence (Dooley et al., 2019; Nixon, 2012; Gutman and McMaster, 2020)
 - Males tend to have higher SDQ externalising difficulties (Nixon, 2020)

Previous Literature (2)

- Family, peer and teacher relationships
 - Quality of parent-child, child-child and teacher-child relationships associated with socio-emotional outcomes (Hartas, 2019; Högberg et al., 2020; Nixon, 2012; Parkes et al., 2014; Smyth et al., 2011)

Caveats

- Causality
 - For example, direction of relationship between parent-child relationship quality and SDQ internalising problems?
- Source bias
 - SDQ reported by mother (but results consistent when SDQ as reported by teacher is used instead)
- Measurement of peer relationships
 - On the left-, as well as the right-hand side of the SDQ model modes
 - But we also found strong associations with life satisfaction

Discussion

- Many common factors (SES, lone parenthood, etc.)
- Will be important to track '08 cohort into adolescence to see if '98 gender patterns in SDQ are replicated
- Relative importance of school factors
- More nuanced role of parent-child relationship for '98
- Impact of COVID-19
 - CSO data on effects of school closures indicate parental concerns around social development as well as learning
 - GUI COVID-19 surveys show large declines in wellbeing of children, parents and young people
 - Forthcoming report in early 2022 on '98 Cohort