Reviewer’s report

Title: Explaining gender differences in non-fatal suicidal behaviour among adolescents: a population-based study

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Reviewer: Antonia Bifulco

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The paper examines gender differences in non-fatal suicide behaviour in a representative large sample of 5,500 students aged around 14. Standardised self-report measures were used. Rates were found to be substantially higher in girls, who also had higher rates of internalising disorder. Such internalising disorder was found to be the main reason for higher self-harm in the girls with gender contributing little to the overall models. Developmental issues were discussed to explain the relatively higher rates of psychopathology in girls at this age. The phenomenon was identified as a public health issue and calls for greater preventative and intervention work.

The authors point to study limitations such as its cross-sectional design.

Comment:

The study is impressive, it tackles a very real public health issues, and utilises a very large representative sample size, appropriate measurement for the numbers used and with sophisticated statistical analysis. The paper is very clearly written. I have no real criticisms, but just a few points the authors may want to include in the discussion:

- Self-report methods can be open to bias, and may indicate over reporting, particularly influenced by other ongoing emotional disorder, or possibly style may be influenced by gender. The authors should comment on potential reporting style differences in girls and boys.

- The paper clearly set out to look for thoughts and plans in relation to suicide, however including a wider range of deliberate self harm would also have been useful to see if such behaviours were similarly related to internalising disorder and gender. The authors may care to comment on whether this would have led to similar findings.

- It would be interesting given discussion of adolescent development, to know whether the authors think that the age selected reflects a peak of suicidal behaviour and whether at a later age boys may be more similarly affected with increases in conduct disorder?