The gender gap in common mental disorder and self-harm, England 2000 to 2015

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Background
Women’s mental health is rarely the focus of specific study, policy attention, or specialist provision. Despite this, women’s higher rates of common mental disorders (CMD) have been evident over time, across countries, and in different social and economic groups. We examined whether the gender gap in rates of CMD is stable or changing.

Methods
The Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) is a two-phase general population survey. Surveys were conducted in 1993 (10,108 16-64 years), 2000 (8,580, 16-74), 2007 (7,503, 16+), and 2014 (7,456, 16+) using robust stratified, multi-stage probability samples of households. We used comparable tools to assess several types of psychiatric disorder in the 90 minute (average) interview. The revised Clinical Interview Schedule (CIS-R) was used to assessed six types of common mental disorder (CMD). Weighted data were analysed in SPSS v23, controlling for complex survey design.

Results
Since 2000, there’s been a slight but steady increase in the proportion of women with CMD (CIS-R score 12+), but overall stability in men. In 1993, 16-24 year old women (19.2%) were twice as likely as 16-24 year old men (8.4%) to have symptoms. In 2014, CMD was about three times more common in women of that age (26.0%) than men (9.1%). Over this period rates of self-harming doubled in young men, and tripled in young women. While hazardous use of alcohol declined in young men since 2000 (from 9.5% to 5.2%), it was stable in young women (from 4% to 3.2%).

Conclusions
The gap in CMD between young men and young women has grown. While externalising responses to stress remain higher in men, this gap has shrunk. Self-harm has increased in all groups, but reached unprecedented levels in young women.

Key messages:
- The gender gap in mental health in increasing in the young.
- Young women have emerged as an urgent priority for self-harm prevention and mental health promotion.