

**Understanding the Mental Distress That Leads to NSSI Among
Chinese Adolescents in Hong Kong:
A Three-wave Longitudinal Study**

Abstract

Nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI) is a behavior that individuals purposely harm or hurt themselves without the intention of suicide. Typical methods include cutting, burning, head-banging and hitting. The prevalence, the risk factors and the functions of NSSI have been widely researched. However, the underlying psychological mechanisms that lead to NSSI are still unclear. Three models have proposed different types of mental distress that may lead to NSSI. The Anti-Dissociation Model speculates that dissociative experiences like depersonalization, derealization, numbness or emptiness are the triggers of NSSI. The Emotional Cascade Model emphasizes ruminative negative thoughts as the triggers of NSSI. The Experiential Avoidance Model argues that different types of negative emotion are the triggers of NSSI. It is still unclear how these different types of distress may lead to NSSI. In this dissertation, the construct of subjective psychache was introduced in understanding the underlying psychological processes that lead to NSSI. Psychache is a construct used in studying the mental suffering that lead to suicide. It emphasizes the mental distress intensity and negative valence without specifying the type of emotion. The model proposed in this dissertation assumes the effects of rumination or dissociation on NSSI are mediated through subjective psychache they created. In this study, a three-wave longitudinal

design was used to track the changes of different variables and how they were related to the development of NSSI over time. The latent growth modeling was used to track the effects of the initial level and the change level of psychache on NSSI. Over 3,000 participants were recruited from six co-educational secondary schools of the Po Leung Kuk in Hong Kong. Subjects completed measures assessing rumination, dissociation, psychache, and NSSI over three time points. Negative emotion was assessed in Wave 2 as the control variable. Moreover, a small group of subjects were invited for an in-depth interview to assess the detailed experiences of their NSSI episodes. The affective, bodily and cognitive components of their mental distress were assessed. Findings indicated that psychache could significantly mediate the effects of ruminative symptoms and dissociative symptoms in both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses. Data from in-depth interviews provided qualitative information on the psychological experiences that lead to NSSI among adolescents. Future research directions were discussed based on the findings from this study.

摘要

非自殺性自傷行為指的是個體在沒有自殺意圖的前提下有意傷害自己的行為。常見的方式包括割傷、燒傷、撞牆、撞擊。關於非自殺性自傷行為的發生率、影響因素和基本功能已經被前人廣泛研究。然而，其潛在的心理機制仍不明確。解離對抗模型指出諸如人格解離、現實解離、麻木、空洞等解離症狀引發了非自殺性自傷行為。情緒漩渦理論則認為消極的反芻思維是引起非自殺性自傷行為的主要原因。而情境迴避模型則強調，不同類型的消極情緒可能引發了非自殺性自傷行為。對於這幾種心理痛苦引發自傷行為的具體機制仍舊有待研究。本篇論文採用心裡疼痛的概念來探究自傷行為的潛在心理機制。心裡疼痛曾用於描述自殺行為的心理痛苦，強調的是心理痛苦的消極性和嚴重性，而並沒有侷限與特定類型的消極情緒。本論文提出的模型認為，無論是解離症狀或是反芻思維，其引起的是一種強烈的心理痛苦，而並不是一般程度的消極情緒。本研究採用追蹤研究範式，通過三次時間點的評估追蹤不同變量的變化，以考察心裡疼痛在不同時間點下對非自殺性自傷行為的影響。潛變量增長模型將用於描述心裡疼痛和自傷行為的初始水平和變化水平。超過 3000 名參與者招募自香港保良局下屬的六所中學。參與者連續三次完成關於反芻思維、解離症狀、心裡疼痛和自傷行為的評估，每次評估間隔半年。第二次評估加入了消極情緒作為控制變量。除此之外，本研究還招募了一小部分參與者進行深入訪談，以了解非自殺性自傷行為發生的具體情境，具體詢問了其心理痛苦的情緒、身體感受及認知因素。本研究發現，在橫斷研究和追蹤研究的兩種範式下，心裡疼痛都可以顯著地中介反芻思維和解離症狀對於自傷行為的影響效

應。而深入訪談的結果揭示了關於自傷行為發生前、時、後，個體心理痛苦的具體表現。最後，在本研究已發現結果的基礎上對未來研究的方向進行了探討。