Nail Biting and Nail Picking: A Comparison of Related Behaviors
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INTRODUCTION

Nail biting (NB) and nail picking (NP) are categorized as body focused repetitive behaviors (BFRBs) (1)

- BFRBs are urge-driven behaviors that often co-occur with anxiety (2)
- The literature has mainly focused on other BFRBs (e.g., skin picking, hair pulling)
- Surprisingly, more individuals report NB/NP (3, 4)

Objective: Compare and contrast two commonly occurring, yet understudied BFRBs, NB and NP, using self-report measures evaluating clinical characteristics

Hypothesis: We expected that NB and NP would show differences in reported consequences after engagement.

METHODS

Subjects
- NB individuals (N=473); average age 19.17 (SD=2.03)
- NP individuals (N=236), average age 19.21 (SD=3.20)

Design
- Sample taken from larger online, self-report study investigating the relationship between BFRBs and non-suicidal self-injuries
- Measured emotional symptoms, age of behavior onset, and assessed clinical symptom features (Table 1).

RESULTS

- NB group reported greater automatic behavior (i.e., behavioral pattern) occurrence than NP group, t(707)=2.29, p < .05 (Figure 1)
- NP group greater reported engaging in behavior to fix appearances (i.e., motivation) than NB group, t(707)=3.05, p < .01 (Figure 2)
- NB group reported greater tension relief (i.e., consequence) after giving in to urges than NP group, t(707)=2.28, p < .05 (Figure 3).
- NB group reported an earlier onset of behavior engagement (M=9.75) than NP group (M=11.08) (Figure 4)

DISCUSSION

NB and NP are similar in nature, but involve unique clinical characteristics that may be key for pinpointing respective treatments for optimal behavior reduction.

- Earlier age of behavior onset (NB) may correspond to engagement in finger sucking
- NB individuals reported the behavior to be more automatic than NP individuals, but more relieving for tension, which may point to a need for NB awareness training
- NP individuals reported more purposeful engagement (e.g., fixing appearance), training may focus on challenging appearance beliefs

Limitations: Unequal sample sizes and self-report design
Future Research: Investigate the attention involved in both NB and NP engagement.

REFERENCES


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