

# Characteristics and outcomes of patients presenting for emergency mental health assessment to acute mental health units in Cork city

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## Background

- Patients attending for emergency assessment to mental health services have immediate mental health needs. They often present with symptoms of low mood, suicidal ideation, mania and psychosis.
- In the absence of 24-hour emergency psychiatric assessments in the community, patients requiring assessment are required to attend an emergency department or acute mental health unit for assessment. This can be a stressful experience for patients due to capacity and environmental issues in both settings<sup>1,2</sup>
- Cork Mental Health Services covers a population of 540,000 across four catchment areas<sup>3</sup>.
- In Cork city there are two centres where patients may receive an acute mental health assessment: Acute Mental Health Unit in Cork University Hospital and St. Michael's Unit in the Mercy Hospital. These centres serve the two city catchment area with a population of 420,000
- Both centres have provision for patients to be assessed on a 24-hour basis. Separate to this, patients may be seen in the emergency department of both hospitals.

## Aims

- Aim:**
- Review emergency assessment process in acute mental health units in Cork city
- Objectives**
- Develop a better understanding of patient demographics of those presenting for emergency assessment
  - Characterise the reasons for referral for emergency assessment
  - Identification of the referral source
  - Identify outcomes for patients who present to an acute mental health unit for emergency assessment.

## Methods

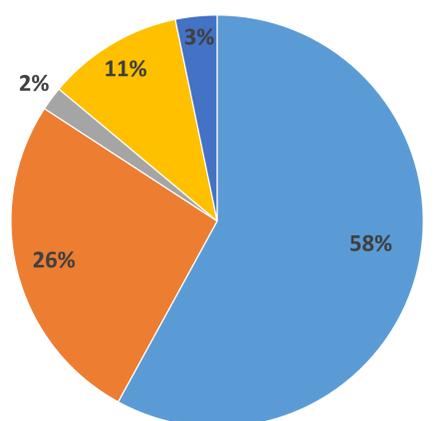
- A retrospective review of the emergency assessment database in both St. Michael's Unit in the Mercy Hospital and Acute Mental Health Unit, Cork University Hospital from April 2019 to April 2020.
- Demographic details, reasons for referral, referral source and outcome of assessment of all patients seen for emergency assessment are recorded on a database. This is a password protected excel file within a shared drive accessible to doctors within the service.
- The data was extracted and analysed from September to November 2020.
- Ethical Approval obtained from Ethics Committee of the Cork Teaching Hospitals.

## Results

### Demographics

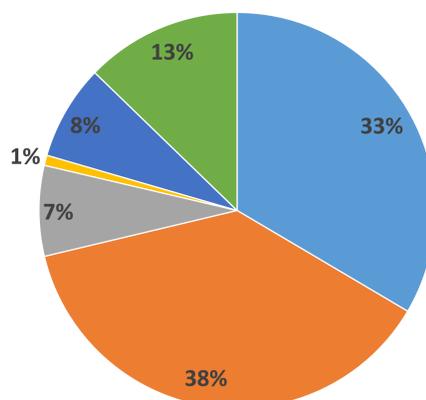
- 1162 assessments were undertaken during the study period
- 64% (n=744) were assessed in Cork University Hospital, 36% (n=418) were assessed in Mercy University Hospital
- 51% (n= 595) of patients were male and 49% (n=567) were female

### Relationship Status



■ Single ■ Married ■ Co-Habiting  
■ Separated ■ Widowed

### Current Employment Status

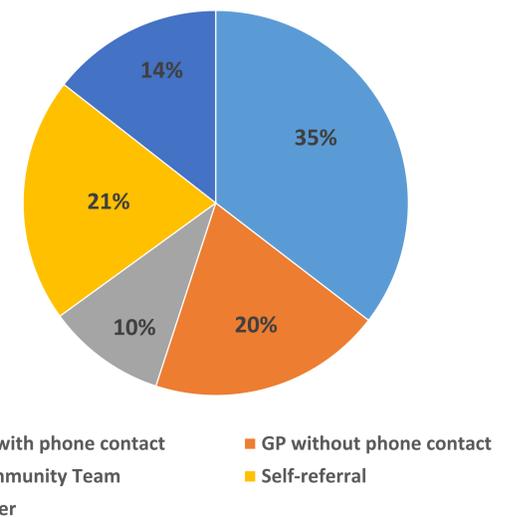


■ Employed ■ Unemployed ■ Retired  
■ Self employed ■ Student ■ Disability

### Assessment Characteristics

- Assessment on an acute mental health unit was the first contact with mental health services for 21% (n=238) of patients assessed
- 35% (n=412) of patients were assessed during office hours. 47% (n=549) were assessed on weekday evenings/nights. 14% (n=165) of patients were assessed at weekend

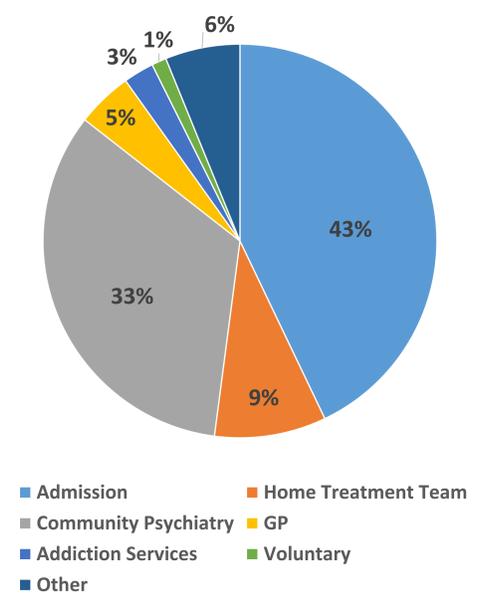
### Referral Agent



### Principal Reason for Presentation

- The commonest reason for presentation was suicidal ideation (29%, n=342). This was followed by psychosis (19%, n=221), low mood (16%, n=187) and anxiety (11%, n=124)

### Assessment Outcome



■ Admission ■ Home Treatment Team  
■ Community Psychiatry ■ GP  
■ Addiction Services ■ Voluntary  
■ Other

## Discussion

- Over half those assessed required admission or referral for home treatment team input indicating a high burden of mental illness in those presenting for assessment.
- Improved communication pathways for the referrer, highlighting assessment alternatives may reduce inappropriate referrals to acute units for emergency mental health assessment
- There is a potential role for an acute community psychiatry assessment model which would allow a significant proportion of patients to be seen in a less intensive environment.

## Contact

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## References

1. <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/mental-health-covid-er-5318468-Jan2021/>
2. <https://www.independent.ie/opinion/comment/only-247-mental-health-care-will-halt-crisis-in-emergency-departments-31333851.html>
3. Inspector of Mental Health Services. Overview of National Mental Health Services 2016. Mental Health Commission. [https://www.mhcirl.ie/File/IMHS\\_overviewNMHS2016.pdf](https://www.mhcirl.ie/File/IMHS_overviewNMHS2016.pdf)