



A Retrospective Study to Explore the Effects of COVID-19 and the Lockdown Measures on Application and Admissions under Mental Health Act

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Background

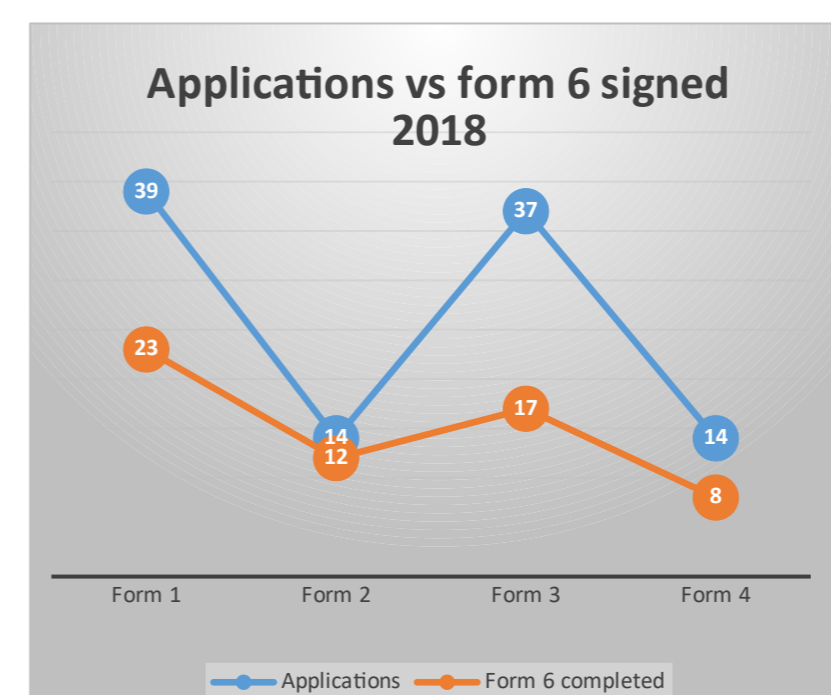
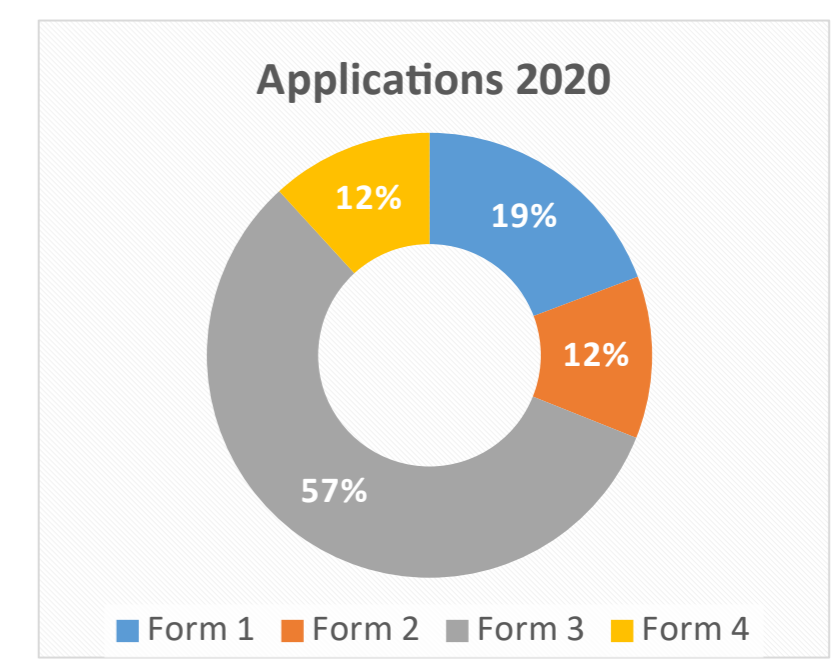
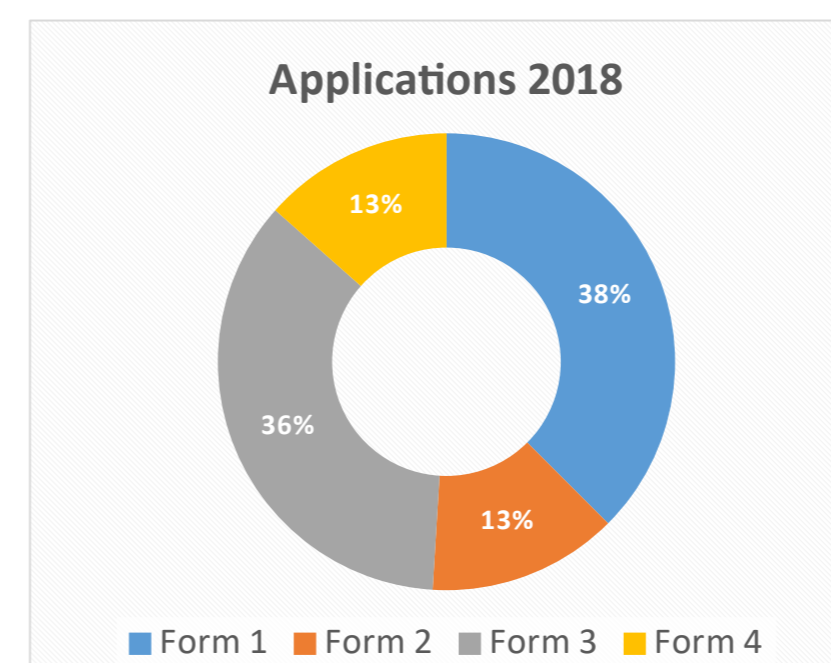
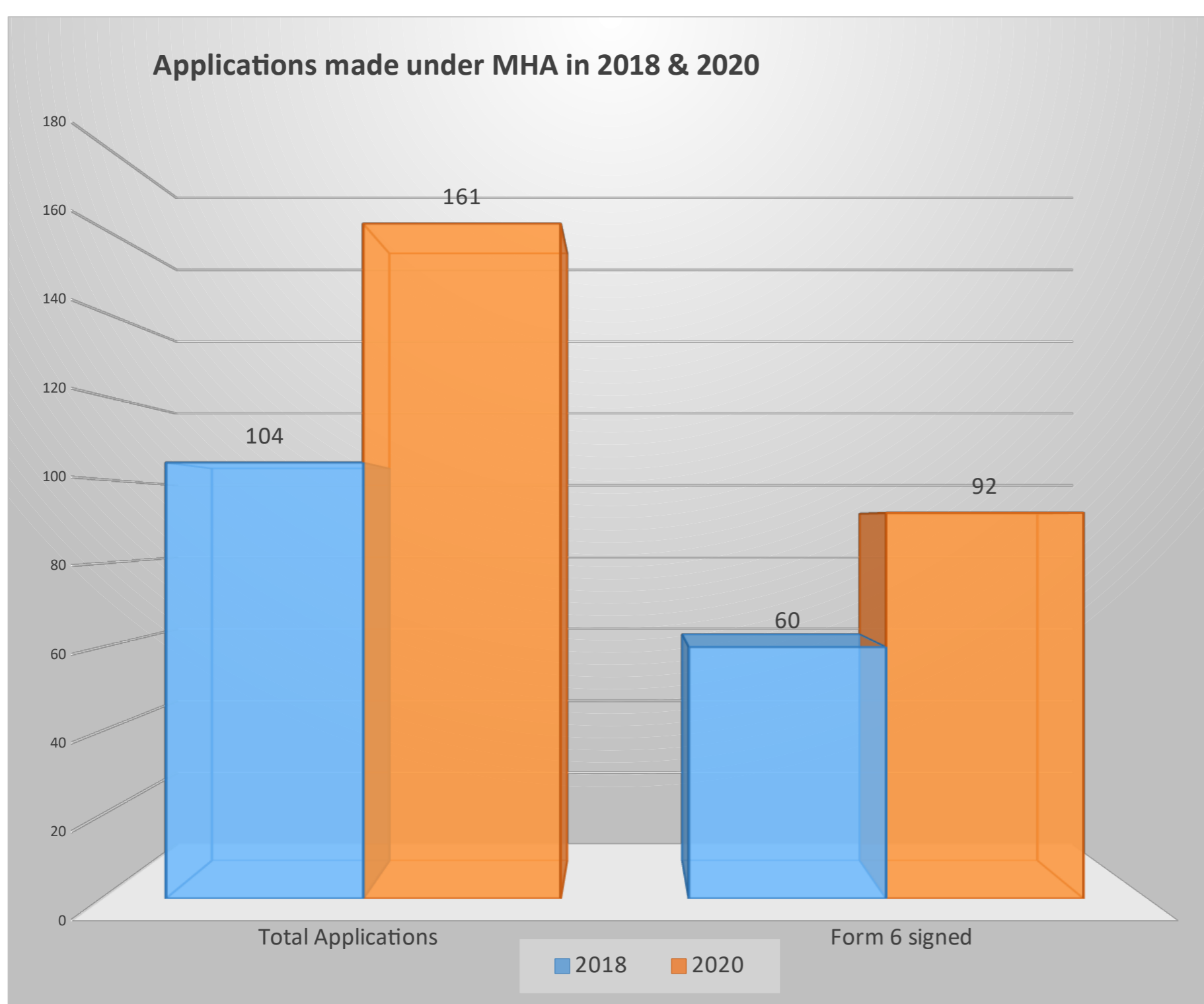
COVID-19 pandemic has now infected more than 200 millions people and killed 4.4 millions worldwide since December 2019. Ireland sees its first cases in February 2020, and subsequently, restrictive measures had to be introduced to curb it. Unfortunately, it has unwanted effects towards mental health.

Aims and objectives

To determine if COVID-19 restriction impacted on the number and nature of involuntary presentations to an approved unit.

Method

All admissions (voluntary and involuntary) to Department of Psychiatry, Midlands Regional Hospital, Portlaoise were examined for one year starting from January 2020 (COVID-19 period) and were compared with the same period in 2018 (Control period). Data were obtained from the National Psychiatric Inpatient Reporting System (NPIRS), which is an anonymised service data base available from the Health Research Board.



Results

There were 558 admissions in 2020. 161 applications were made under MHA, and out of this, 92 had form 6 completed. There were 593 admissions in 2018. 104 applications were made under MHA, and 60 subsequently had form 6 completed. The percentages of MHA applications with completed form 6 are similar between 2020 and 2018 (57.1% vs 57.7%). In terms of the nature of the application, in 2020, form 3 applications made by the Gardai accounted for 92 (57% of the applications). This is significant compare to 2018, of which only 37 applications were with form 3 (36%). The other forms were relatively similar between 2018 and 2020. When the completion of form 6 is broken down to the nature of the application, it showed similar percentages of forms being completed for both forms 1 and 3 between 2018 and 2020. But it showed an increased completion from 73.7% to 85.7% for form 2, and a decrease from 73.7% to 57.1% for form 4.

Conclusion

Covid-19 has a major impact on involuntary admissions. The total number of admission reduced by 5.9% from 2018 to 2020, but the number of MHA applications increased by 55%. The increased form 3 applications suggested that the Gardai were making more applications, but only half had form 6 completed (45.9% in 2018 and 43.5% in 2020). The increased Gardai application could be due to people becoming more unwell and presenting to them in this due to less access to mental health services. However, some may be unnecessary, and Gardai education around this is important. The study also highlights the importance of Authorized Officer for application.

Total Admissions

Year	Voluntary	Involuntary
2018	533	60
2020	466	92