

The early impact of Covid 19 on referrals to a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in West Dublin: Comparison of referrals March-December 2019 vs March-December 2020

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Introduction

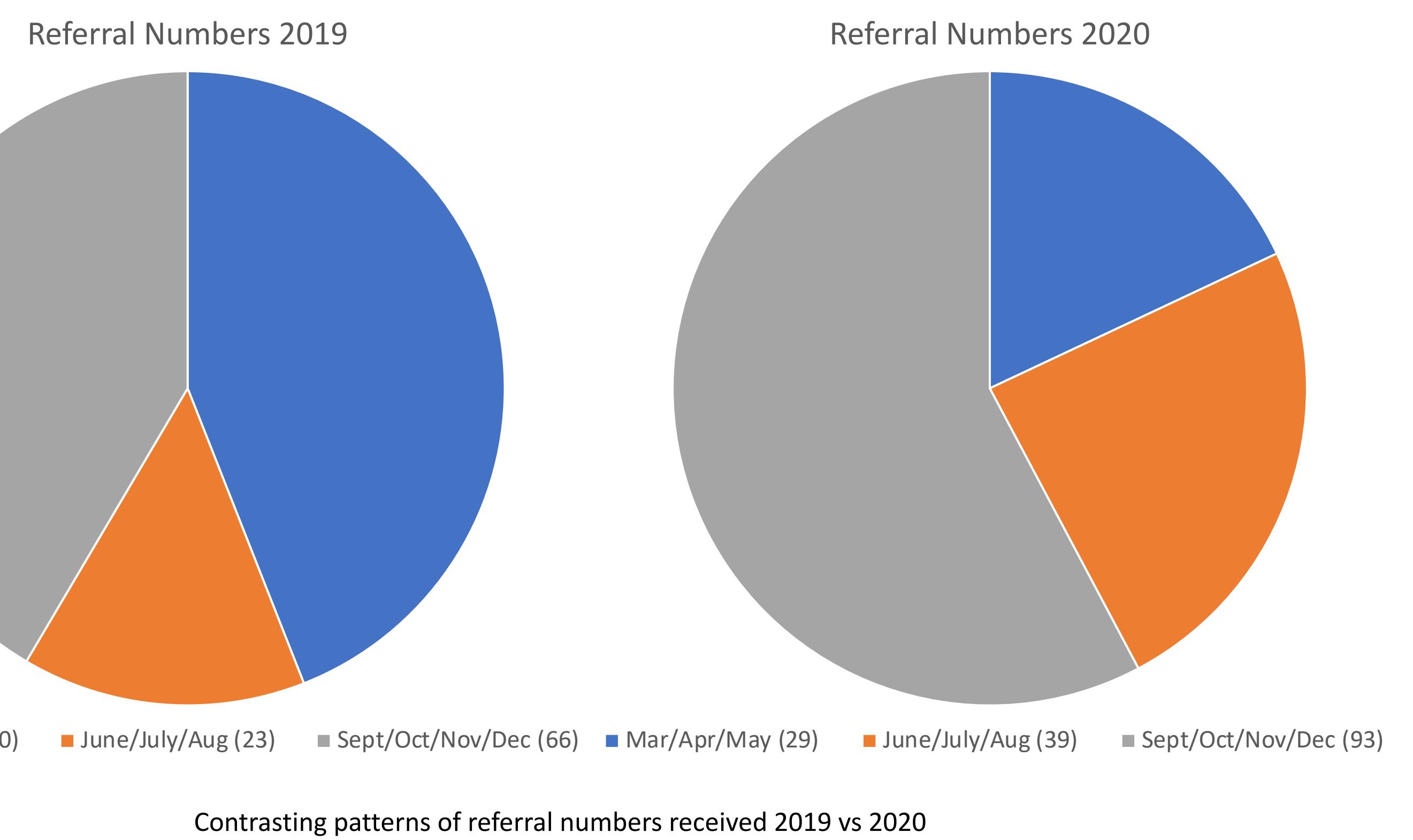
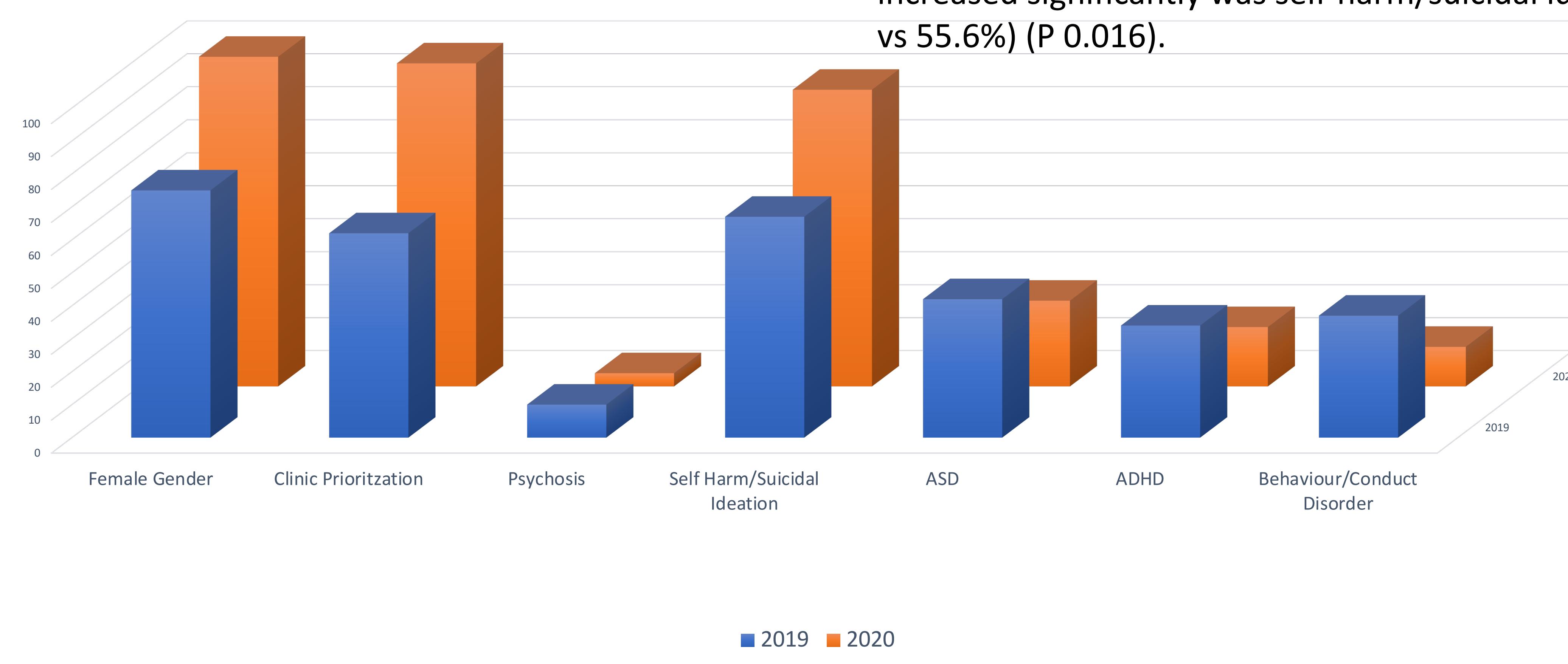
The impact of Covid 19 on society has been severe and has been particularly profound on younger population and in turn their mental health. Empirical data suggest an increased in mental health distress and illness.

Methods

All accepted referrals to Lucena CAMHS Tallaght Team 1 (specific catchment area) in 2019 and 2020 were reviewed. For the purposes of this study referrals from March to December in both years were analysed. Referral letters were batch anonymised and information was drawn as appropriate from these referrals. Information was directly retrieved from referral letters onto the specified proforma. The results were subsequently collated and analysed.

Aims & Objectives

The specific aim of the study was to evaluate the change in referral nature and type between 2019 and 2020 – analysing the early effect Covid 19 had on service referrals. By identifying this change, if present, one can better understand the challenges faced by a CAMHS service in providing effective services and allow for better service delivery.



Results

- There was no significant difference in the number of referrals received in March/December 2019 (n=159) vs March/December 2020. (n=162)
- In 2019 females made up 47.5% of referrals, this increased to 62.1% in 2020 (P 0.012). In 2019 39% of referrals were prioritised as urgent by the clinic, this increased to 61.3% in 2020. (P <0.001)
- Certain presentations dropped significantly – psychosis (10.7% vs 2.5%) (p <0.001), ADHD (21.4% vs 11.1%) (P 0.013), ASD (26.4% vs 16.1%) (P 0.025) and conduct problems (23.3% vs 7.4%) (p <0.001). The only presentation noted to have increased significantly was self-harm/suicidal ideation (42.1% vs 55.6%) (P 0.016).

• Conclusions

- There were less ADHD/ASD cases referred to the clinic– presentations that can normally disrupt schooling and learning. It is worth noting that schools remained closed for large parts of 2020 and the normal pathway for these presentations was disrupted.
- Contrary to other evidence, there was no significant increase in ED presentation to the clinic, however typically numbers of ED in the catchment area are relatively low. Contributory factors for this maybe– SES and demographic of the catchment area.
- Although there was no overall increase in referral rates to the services, there has been variation in types of referrals during Covid, with lower school related disorders such as ADHD and ASD. Given the concerns regarding educational loss linked to online learning, it is crucial that these youth are not doubly disadvantaged by delayed referral and education decline.