

Trends in Eating Disorder presentations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A review of Eating Disorders in children presenting to Tallaght University Hospital.



Tallaght University Hospital

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Aim

Eating Disorders (ED) are serious conditions with life-threatening physical and psychological complications. Research from around the world has indicated a marked increase in ED and admissions to hospitals in recent years. The coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) has profoundly disrupted daily life across the globe, significantly impacting on mental and physical health. The evidence suggests that there has since been an increase in hospital admissions for ED amongst children and adolescents in Ireland. This study was carried out to investigate trends in presentation of ED in young patients (under 16) referred to the Psychiatry Liaison Service (PLS) following admission to Tallaght University Hospital (TUH) for medical stabilisation in a time period preceding and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Method

A retrospective case study was conducted analysing data gathered on ED referred to the PLS between January 2019 and March 2021. Baseline demographic variables, diagnoses, pathways of care, and medical interventions were recorded. We also utilised the JMARSIPAN risk assessment guidelines to identify high risk (Red and Amber) categories on admission. We compared data between 2 time periods using a reference point of March 2020 when the World Health Organisation declared a global pandemic, with governments worldwide imposing several restrictions.

The 2 time periods categorised for the purpose of this study were:

- "Pre Covid-19" (January 2019 to March 2020) - 15 months.
- "During Covid-19" (September 2020 to March 2021) - 7 months.

It is important to note that acute Paediatric services in TUH were closed from March 2020 to September 2020 as a result of Covid-19 restrictions affecting paediatric admission to TUH.

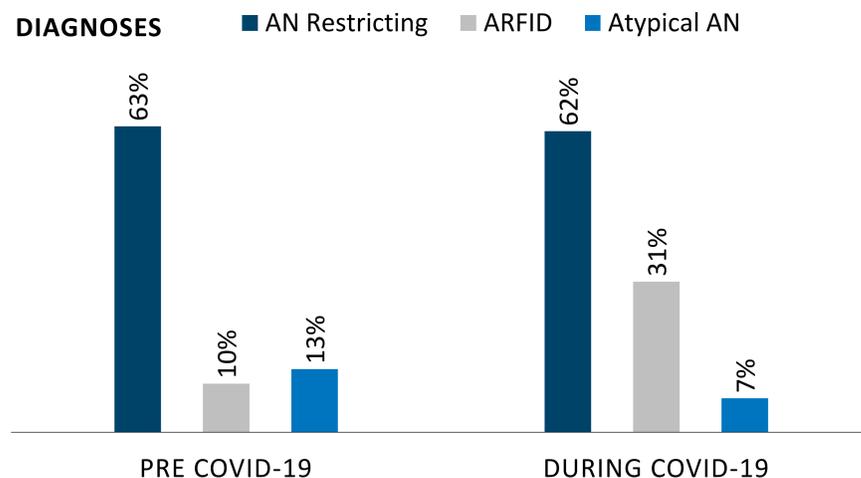
This study was approved by the TUH Research and Ethics Committee.

Results

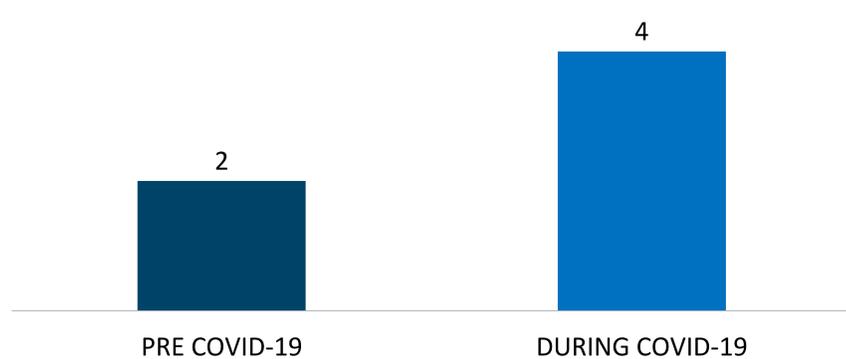
30 patients presented with ED pre Covid-19 compared to 29 during Covid-19. Of these there were only 2 male patients. The mean age was recorded as 13.4 and 13.3 respectively in the two time periods. The key results are outlined below.

Course during hospital admission

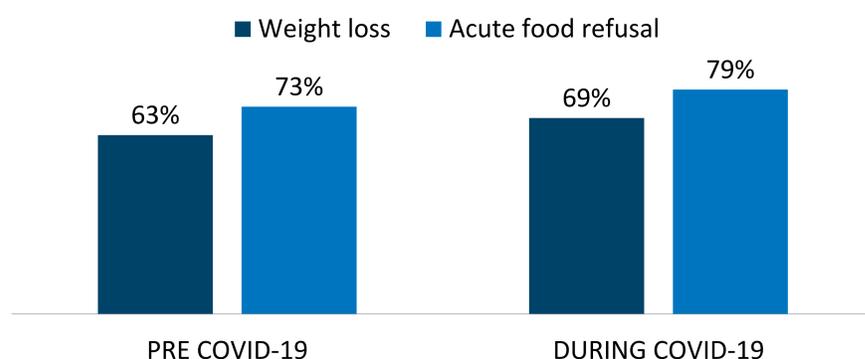
	PRE COVID-19	DURING COVID-19
IV fluids	53%	48%
Nasogastric tube feeding	20%	7%
Refeeding Syndrome	0%	14%
Average length of admission	16 days	21 days
Referral to CAMHS inpatient unit	20%	21%



Average number of presentations per month



Junior MARSIPAN High Risk Categories



Discussion

Findings must be interpreted with caution due to the temporary closure of acute Paediatric services in TUH during the pandemic. This meant that admissions during the pandemic were in a period with fewer number of months. Even so, this study reveals an overall increase in number of presentations of ED during the pandemic highlighted by the results above. We observe AN Restricting type as the predominant diagnosis. Interestingly the number of ARFID presentations were noted to have an increase during the pandemic. Another notable result was the increase in number of Junior MARSIPAN high risk categories during the pandemic and also a longer duration of hospital admission in this period. This preliminary analysis is part of a wider research study about the impact of the pandemic on ED presentations in TUH which give rise to questions around aetiology, progression of illness, prognosis, care pathways, service provisions, etc.