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Introduction:

Worldwide, longitudinal evidence concerning the negative impact of COVID-19 on adolescent mental health is emerging; with significant increases in anxiety levels and depressive symptoms, along with a marked decrease in life satisfaction post-implementation of COVID-19 governmental restrictions documented. In the United States, the impact of Coronavirus has been associated with increased suicidality among Paediatric Emergency Department (ED) attenders. The psychological sequelae of Coronavirus on Ireland's youth is also emerging as children adjust to what is unfolding, and try to adapt to a new post-COVID reality.

Objectives:

- To highlight increasing COVID-related distress in vulnerable under-18s as evidenced by increasing volume of crisis psychiatric referrals/assessments for this age group at an adult ED prior to; at the start of; and a year after pandemic restrictions were enforced.

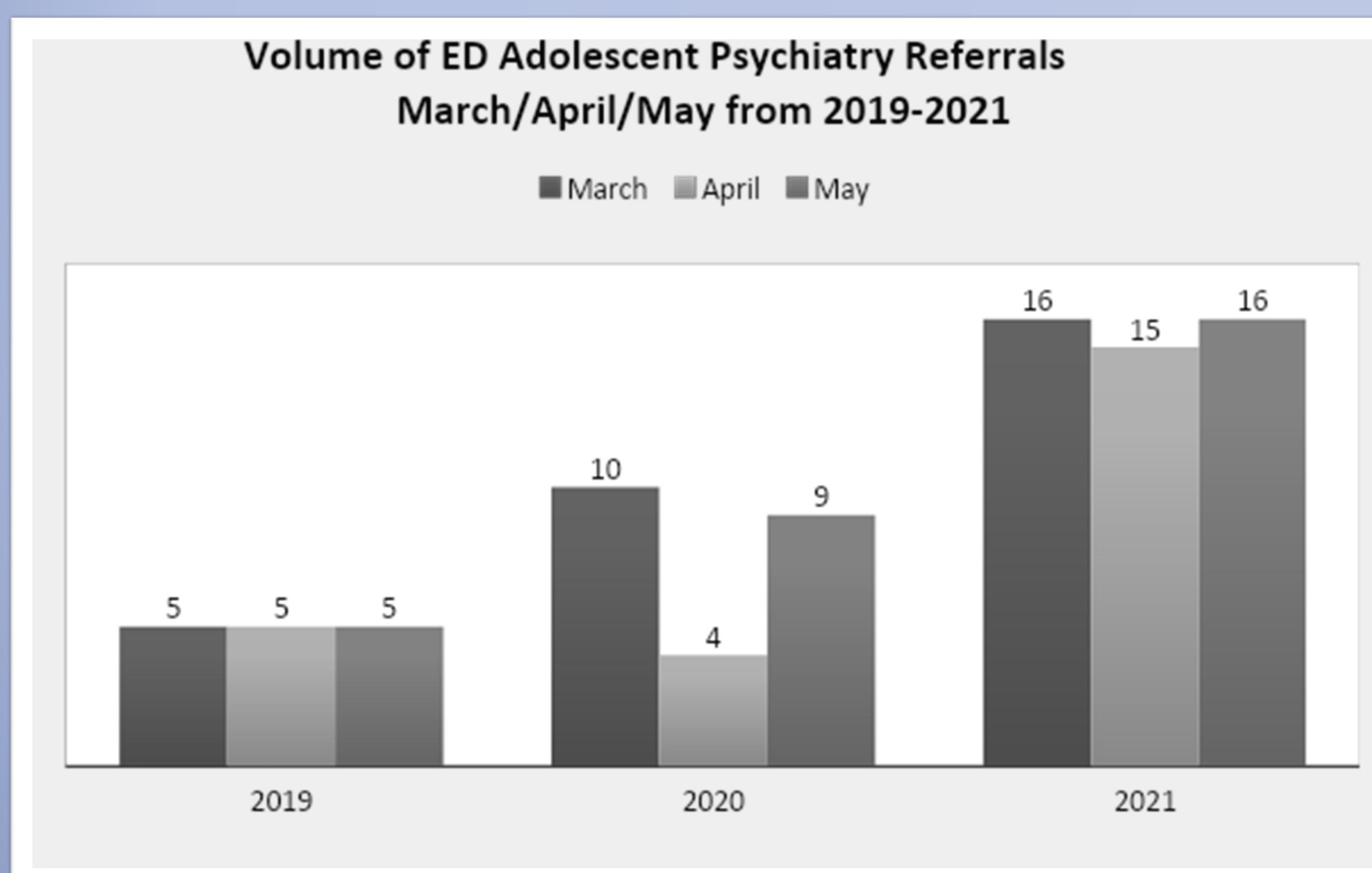
Methods:

This is a retrospective descriptive analysis of acute adolescent psychiatry ED register referrals across 3 time points (March, April, May) throughout 2019, 2020 and 2021. Data were obtained via the hospital's ED-specific electronic database and by manually extracting data logged in the on-call register during the months in question. Inclusion Criteria focused on completed on-call psychiatric assessments of under-18 presenters. Those aged 18-years and over were excluded from the study.

Results:

Psychiatry on-call assessments of under-18s trebled since the onset of the pandemic

- In 2019 - of 270 on-call referrals; 15 were under-18 (representing 5.6% average of total volume)
- In 2020 - of 234 on-call referrals; 23 were under-18 (representing 9.9% average of total volume)
- In 2021 - of 334 on call referrals; 47 were under 18 (representing 14.7% average of total volume)



Month/Year	Over 18	Under 18	Total Referrals	%U18
March 19	92	5	97	5.2%
April 19	76	5	81	6.2%
May 19	87	5	92	5.4%
March 20	56	10	66	15.0%
April 20	63	4	67	5.9%
May 20	92	9	101	8.9%
March 21	103	16	119	13.4%
April 21	80	15	95	15.8%
May 21	40	16	120	14.9%

Conclusions:

- The advent of Coronavirus-related stress, restrictions to autonomy, and social isolation is associated with negative mental health sequelae for vulnerable at risk adolescents, as indicated by a threefold increase in acute ED presentations to an adult hospital over three consecutive months from 2019-2021.
- In Ireland, current under-resourcing of CAMHS and lack of specialised child-specific crisis supports result in the referral of children aged under-18 to the adult ED for crisis assessment and intervention during on-call hours. CAMHS specific support is required to initiate tailored treatment plans, coordinate care planning, and organise placements of under-18's in crisis.

Suggestions for Future Practice:

- Continue gathering data for 2022 to observe trends
- Collaborate with other hospitals to see how the months studied has paralleled their data
- On-going dialogue around utilising CAMHS-specific support for under 18's attending Adult EDs

Declaration

This project was approved as a Service Evaluation Study by TUH in 2021. Hospital Evaluation/Quality Initiative Registration number 43.