

Changes to CAMHS Inpatient Referral Numbers During the Coronavirus Pandemic

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AIMS & HYPOTHESIS

This poster presents data on referrals to the Thames Valley Tier 4 CAMHS Provider Collaborative (TVCP) between April 2019 and March 2021 collected as part of the service provision. The TVCP covers an area with a population size of 3.7 million people. The two years of data comprise one year before the pandemic and one year since, allowing us to show the changes in referral patterns since the virus has been circulating and restrictions imposed.

BACKGROUND

The World Health Organisation declared the spread of COVID-19 to be a pandemic in March 2020¹. Early studies on adolescent mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic have shown various increases in risk as well as vulnerability to the provision of existing care^{2,3,4}. Some studies have shown eating disorder related thoughts, behaviours and presentations increase or worsen during the pandemic^{5,6}, while others have described an increase in children and young people presenting with eating disorders requiring treatment⁷.

METHODS

This is a longitudinal cohort study involving all children and young people referred for an inpatient psychiatric admission within the Thames Valley network between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2021. All referrals made to the TVCP network are received through a single point of access using a standardised referral form. Data collected for each referral includes demographic and clinical information such as diagnoses, treatment information, outcome of referral, waiting time for admission and length of admission.

The data received by the TVCP was used to look at how the number of referrals varied over the two years April '19 to March '20 (19/20) and April '20 to March 2021 (20/21), as well as how specific variables varied including gender, whether eating disorder or disordered eating (ED) was identified, whether the young person had a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), of a Learning Disability (LD) and where nasogastric (NG) tube feeding was being used at the time of referral.

RESULTS

There were 267 referrals in 19/20 and 255 referrals in the year 20/21, which is a 4% decline in the pandemic year compared to the previous year. Graph 1 shows how these referrals varied across the year. Graph 2 shows the age spread of these referrals.

The number of referrals where ED was identified was 108 in the year 19/20 (representing 40% of referrals that year) and 144 in the year 20/21 (representing 56% of referrals that year). This represents an increase in referrals of young people with ED of 34%. Graph 3 shows how the number of referrals of young people with an ED were spread across the year for both years in question, with Graph 4 showing the age of these referrals.

The number of referrals where young people had a diagnosis of ASD or a LD and ED was identified, was 8 in the year 19/20 and 25 in the year 20/21. This represents an increase of 213%. Of note the number of referrals for young people with ASD or LD without ED identified fell from 47 in 19/20 to 36 in 20/21 (a fall of 23%). Graph 5 shows how the number of referrals where young people had a diagnosis of ASD or a LD and ED was identified spread across the year for both years in question, with Graph 6 showing the age of these referrals.

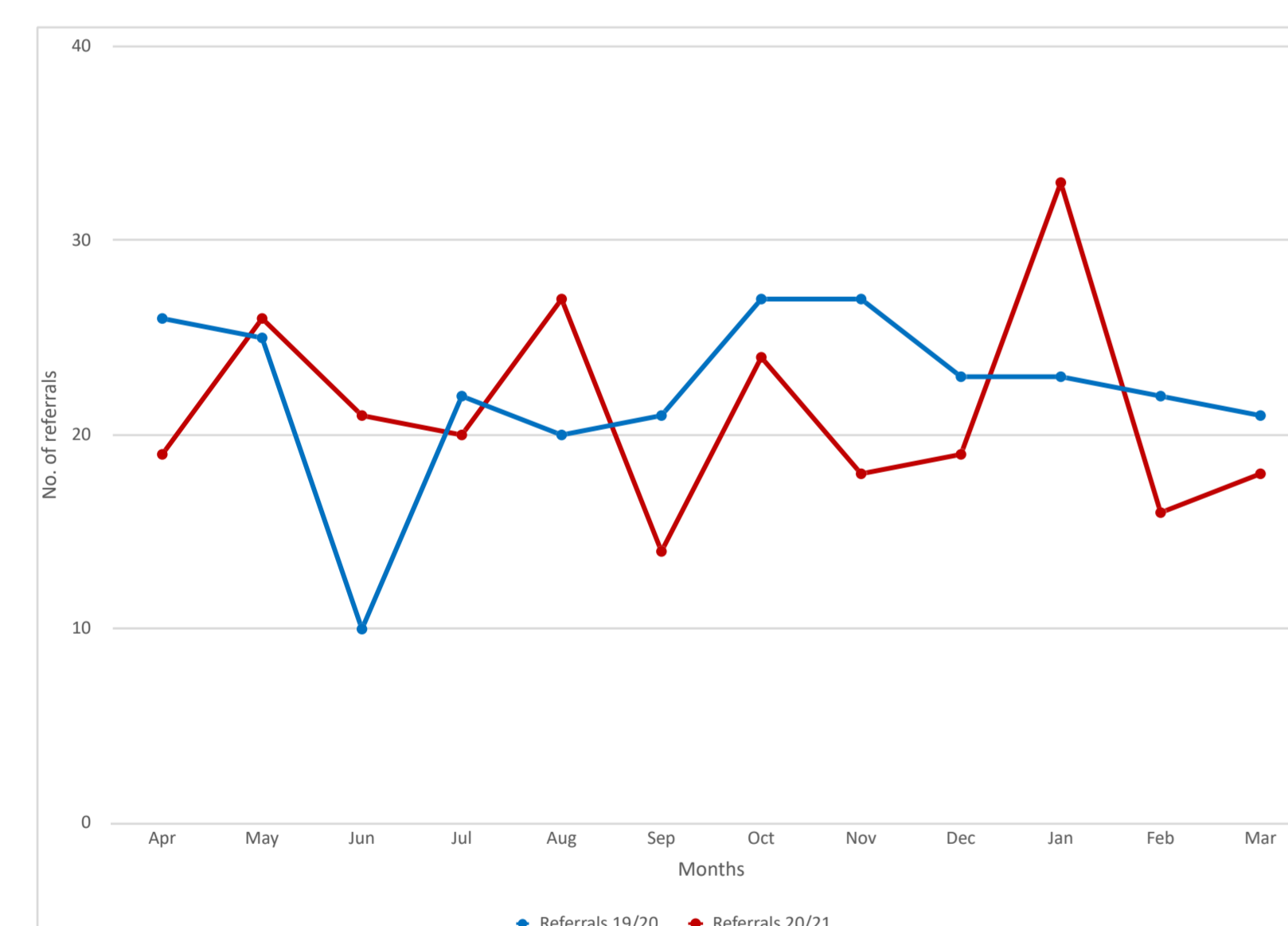
The number of referrals for young people where NG tube feeding was being used at the time of referral was 10 in 19/20 (9.3% of ED referrals and 3.8% of all referrals) and 22 in 21/22 (15.2% of ED referrals, 8.6% of all referrals). This represents an increase of 120%.

CONCLUSION

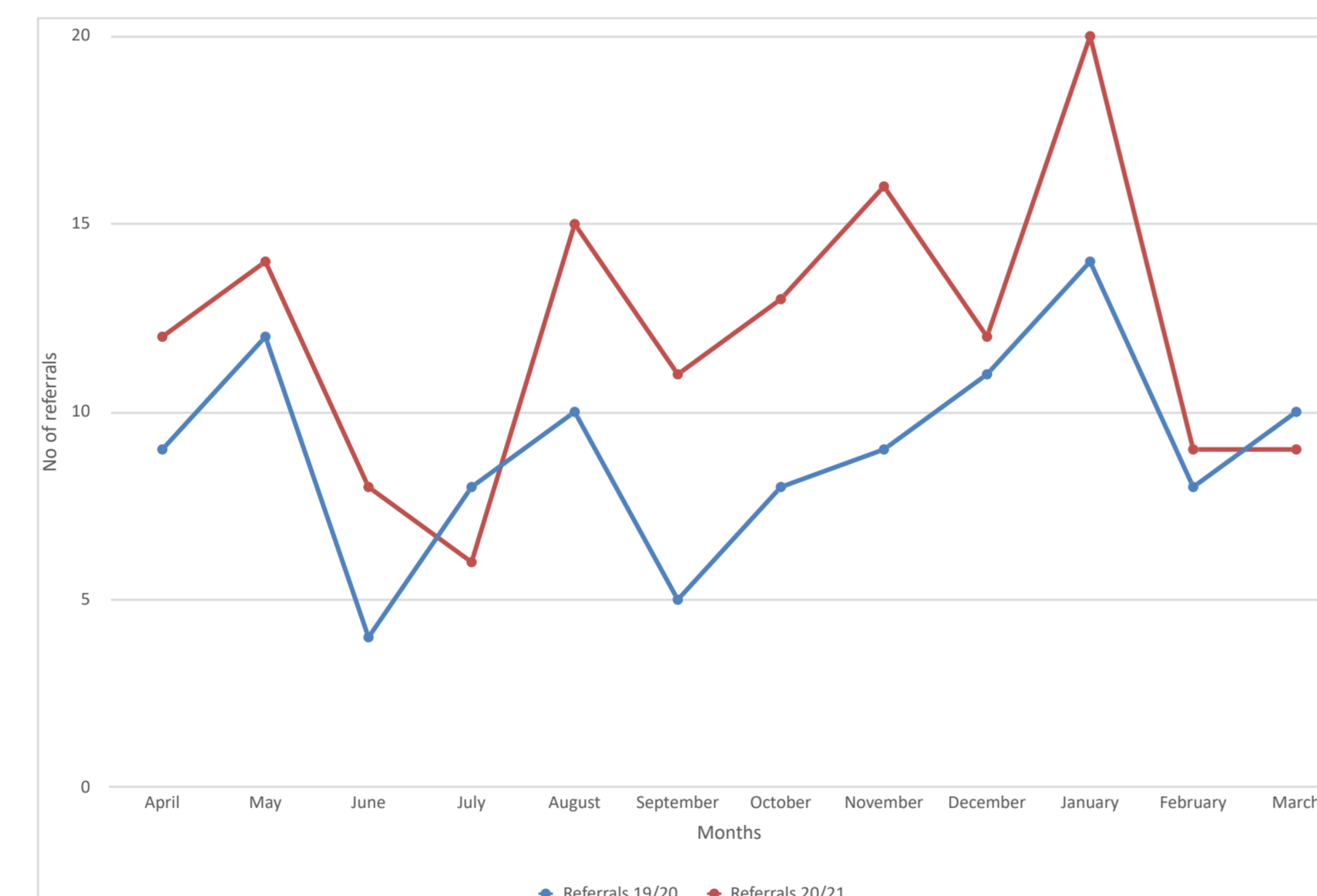
Since the start of the pandemic there has been an increase in the complexity of young people admitted to Tier 4 beds in the TVCP network, particularly the numbers of young people referred with ED and co-morbid ASD or LD. Inpatient services need to adapt to the sensory and other needs of young people with ED and ASD or LD. Further epidemiological information needs to be tracked as referral patterns continue to evolve through the course of the pandemic.

REFERENCES

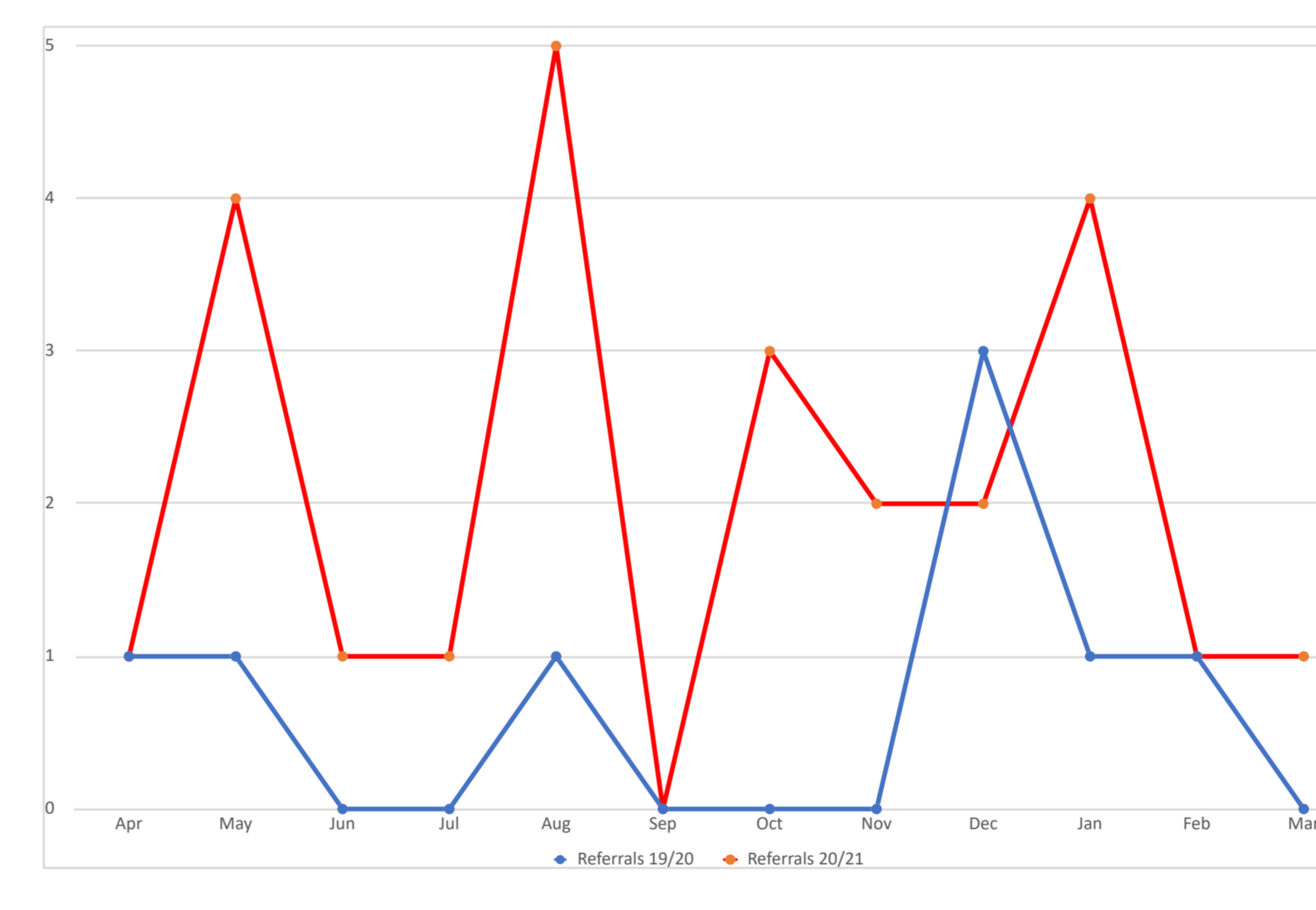
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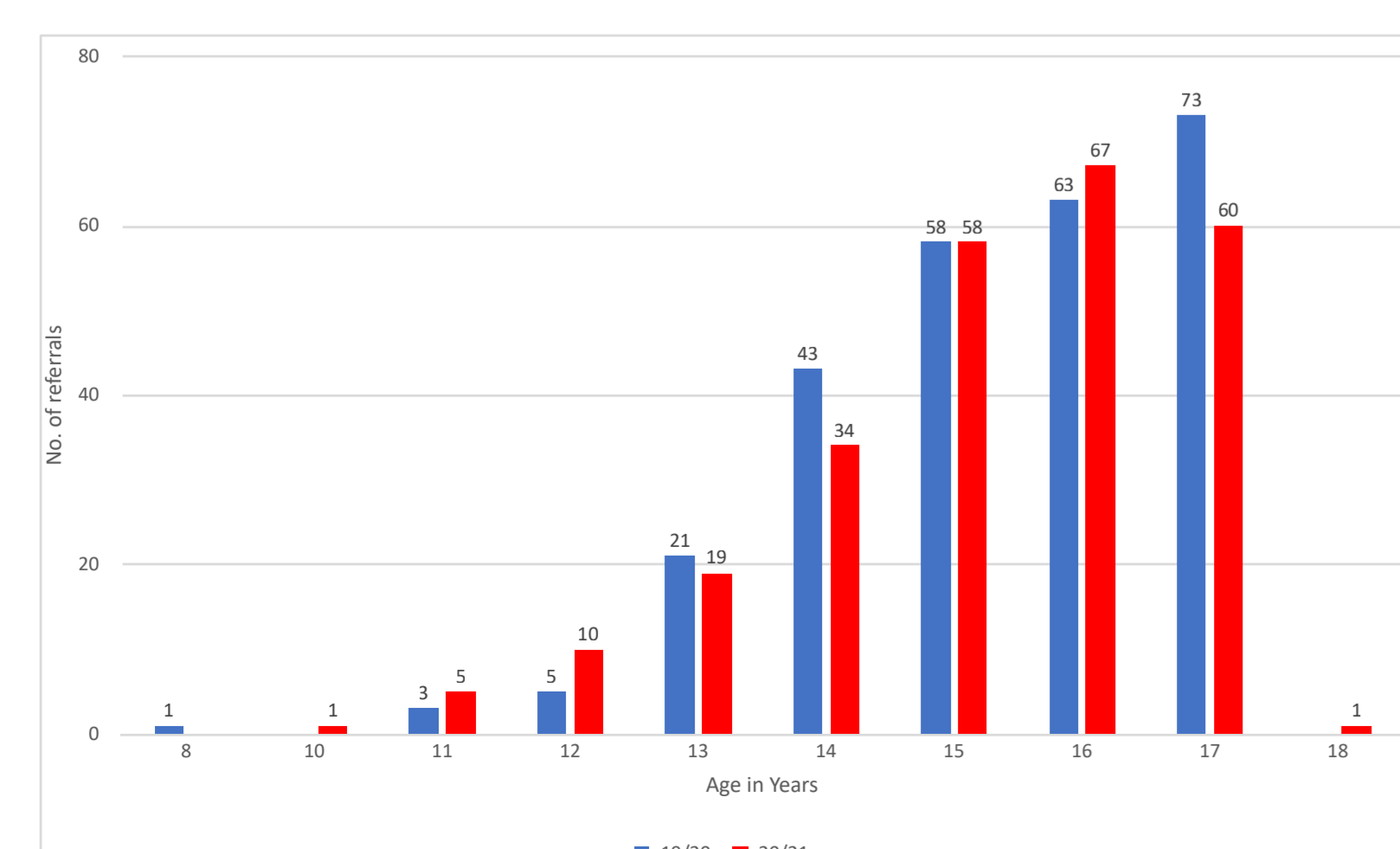
Graph 1: Number of Referrals to TVCPC each month of the year in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021



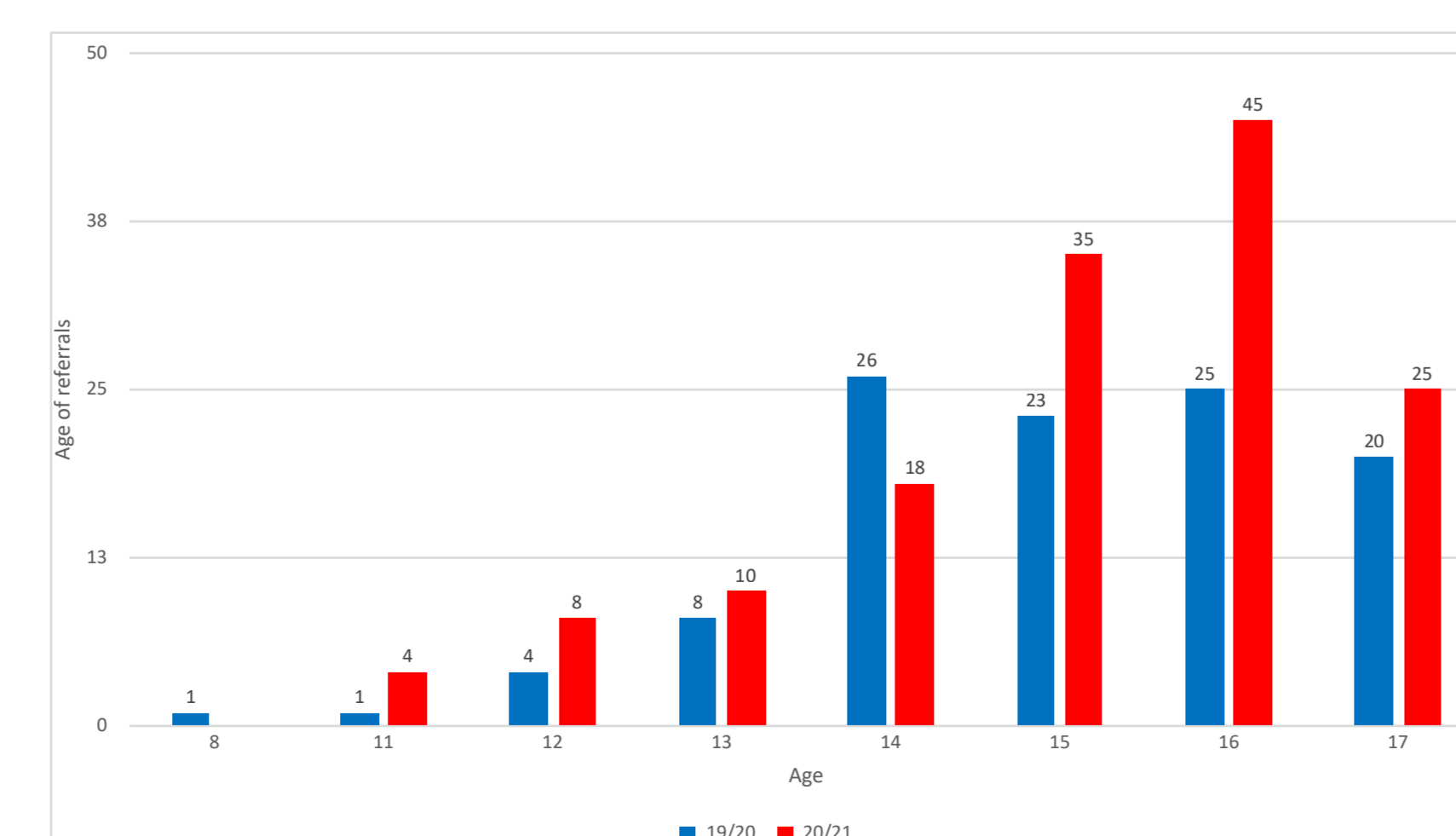
Graph 3: Number of Referrals to TVCPC where ED was identified each month of the year in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021



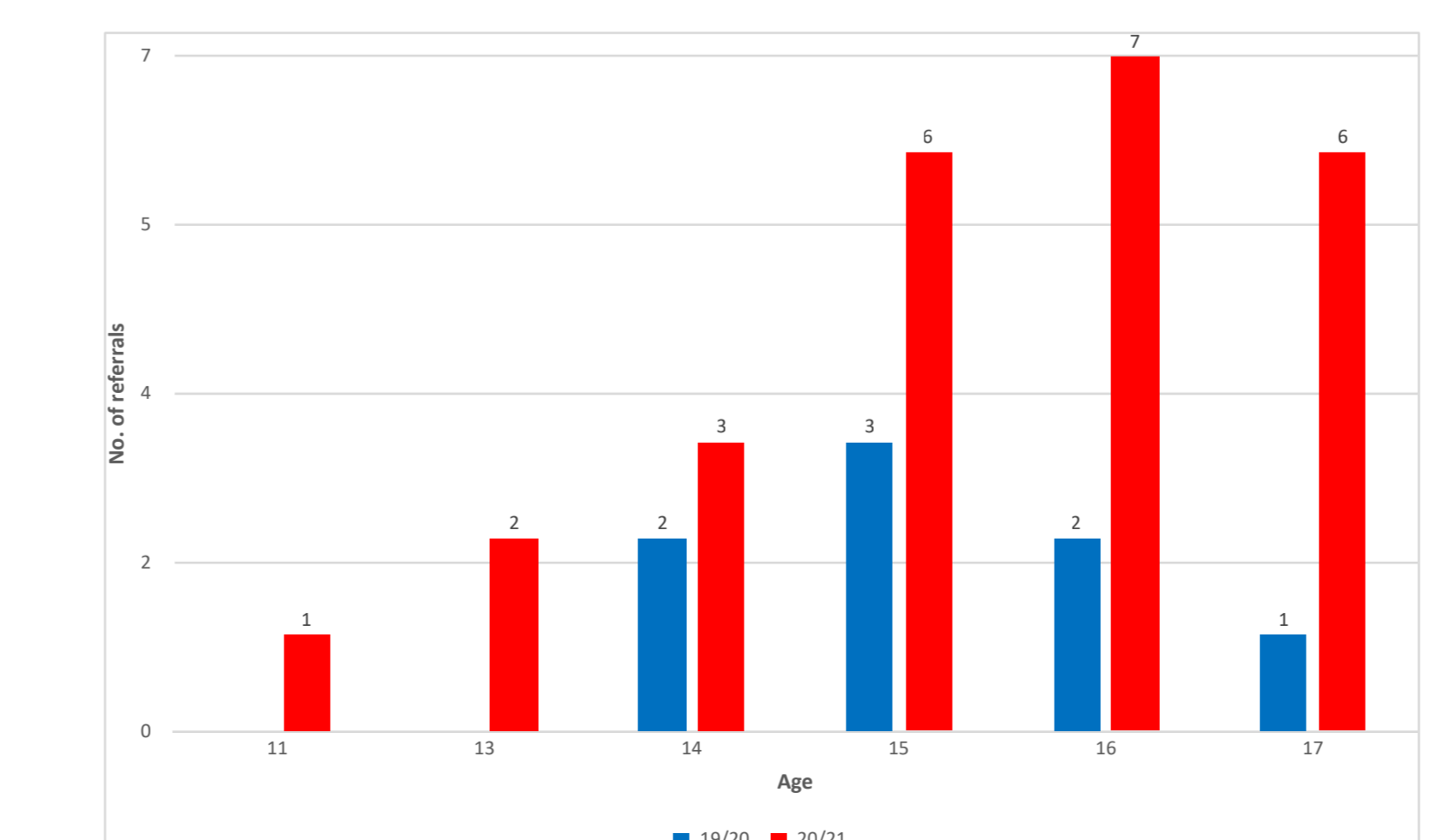
Graph 5: Number of Referrals to TVCPC where young people had a diagnosis of ASD or a LD and ED was identified each month of the year in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021



Graph 2: Age of Referrals to TVCPC in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021



Graph 4: Age of Referrals to TVCPC where ED was identified in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021



Graph 6: Age of Referrals to TVCPC where young people had a diagnosis of ASD or a LD and ED was identified in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021