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SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS OF REFERRALS TO AN IRISH PSYCHIATRIC SERVICE: A TRANSCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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Objectives: This study describes the social, demographic and clinical characteristics of all the new referrals in a mental health catchment area. This study aims to compare Irish and non-Irish service users in terms of their mental health needs and service utilization.

Methods: Case notes were reviewed retrospectively to investigate demographic, clinical and service utilization parameters among new referrals to the psychiatric services in Galway, Ireland over a six-month period.

Results: One hundred and fifty four new referrals, of whom 41 were non-Irish, presented over a six-month period. Results showed no difference between Irish and non-Irish patients in terms of socio-demographic variables. Alcohol problems and subsequent need for detoxification and counseling were significantly increased among service users from the *new EU accession states* with a significant impact on the duration of their hospital stay and the need for intensive psychiatric care.

Conclusions: There is an urgent need for enhanced resources for the delivery of mental healthcare to immigrants. Service utilization and mental health needs are not explained merely by illness-related aspects in immigrant service users. Social and cultural factors have to be recognized in order to prevent disadvantages in psychiatric care.