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Holistic Care for Adolescents: Integrating Bio-Psycho-Social Approaches in the Emergency Department

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Aim

To study the usefulness and acceptability of a holistic bio-psycho-social approach for adolescents with possible psychosomatic symptoms presenting to the Emergency Department (ED).

Background

There has been a concerning increase in behavioural and mental health problems among adolescents who present with psychosomatic symptoms in time-constrained healthcare settings that are often ill-equipped to address their psychosocial needs effectively.

Methods

The KKH multidisciplinary team developed an innovative, self-administered communication tool called the Youth Wellbeing (YWB) questionnaire to enhance psychosocial evaluation in adolescents seen in the ED. Additionally, new roles, known as Youth Connect Associates (YCA), have been developed to manage support and referrals effectively.

Results

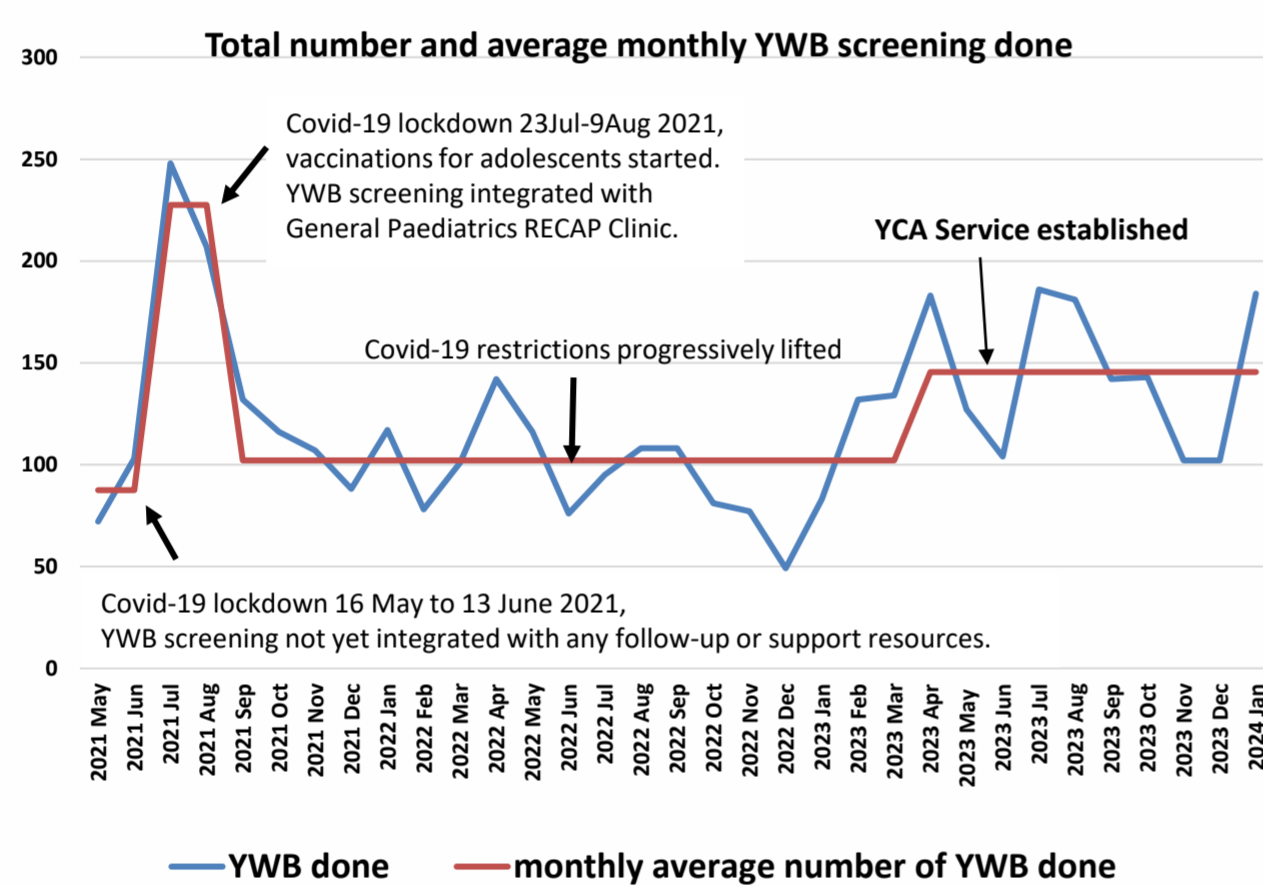


Chart 1. Total number and average monthly YWB screenings done pre- and post-establishment of regular endorsement of YWB screening and YCA service.

Since the establishment of the YCA service and regular use of YWB screenings in CE, we continue to see a significant increase in screenings performed. (In January 2024, the average number of screenings was n=84, and a monthly average of n=145.4). Looking at the pre-and post-implementation figures in Chart 1 and comparing the period in May 2021 and January 2024, there was a 17% increase in average monthly YWB screenings.

In July and August 2021, there was a surge in adolescents reporting "chest pain" after receiving COVID-19 vaccinations, coinciding with a heightened stage of the pandemic. While most tested negative for vaccine-related peri-myocarditis, they underwent YWB screening, enabling appropriate follow-up care. Without this screening tool, their mental well-being might have been overlooked, with a focus solely on managing potential vaccination side effects.

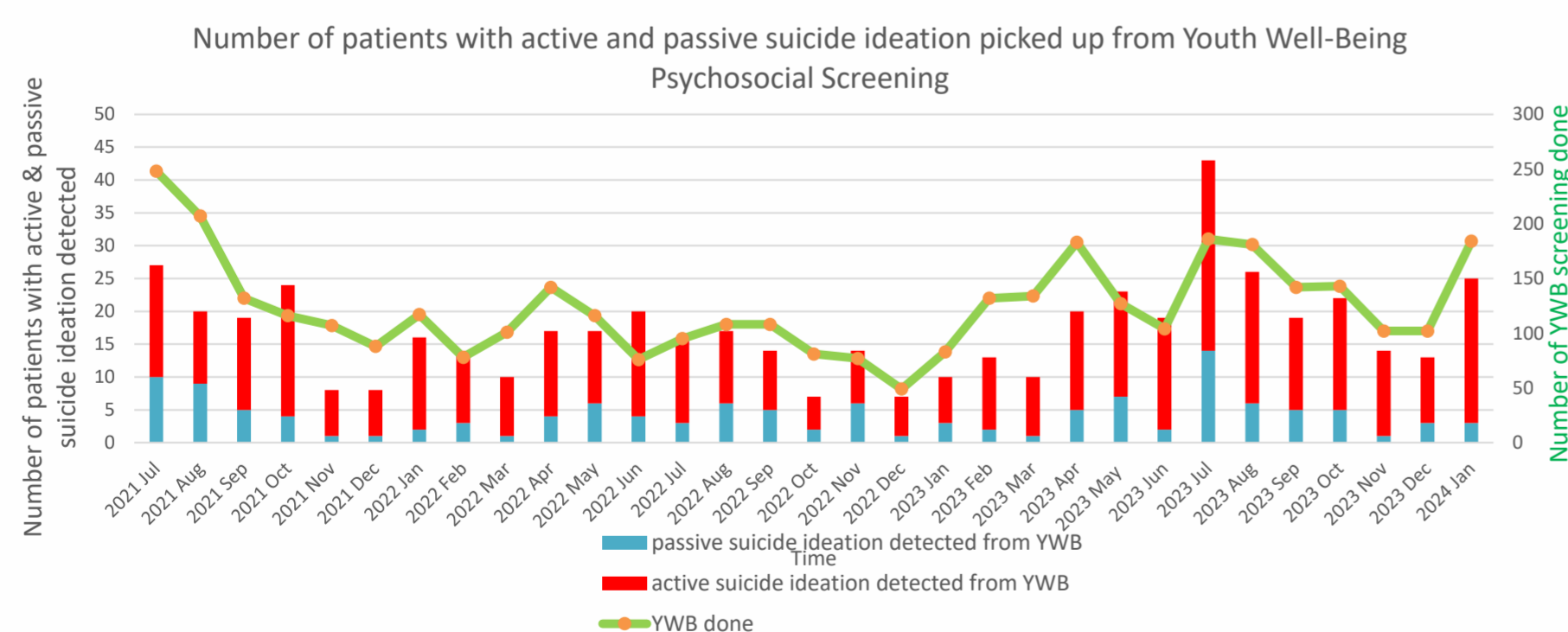


Chart 2: YWB questionnaire enables disclosures of mood difficulties which trigger face-to-face Suicide Risk Screening. Adolescents with suicide risks are recognised and receive timely mental health support and interventions.

The increase in YWB screening revealed a higher number of distressed adolescents with suicidal thoughts. As demonstrated in Chart 2, in July 2023, the screening identified 29 adolescents with active suicidal ideation and 29 with passive suicidal ideation, compared to July 2021, where only 17 adolescents were identified with active suicidal ideation, and 10 had passive suicidal ideation. This trend suggests improved recognition of adolescents with suicidal thoughts since the project's implementation.

Conclusion

Integrating biopsychosocial approaches into healthcare is crucial for addressing the complex needs of adolescents presenting to the ED with psychosomatic symptoms. Without this holistic approach, these young patients would likely continue to be over-medicalised, with their underlying psychosocial distress remaining unrecognised and untreated. In the face of the adolescent mental health crisis, the implementation of bio-psycho-social strategies and value-driven care has become pivotal and increasingly indispensable. By focusing on achieving health outcomes that truly matter to patients, we can ensure that care is both effective and efficient. This approach not only enhances the quality of care but also supports sustainable healthcare delivery that meets the diverse needs of adolescents and contributes to their long-term well-being.

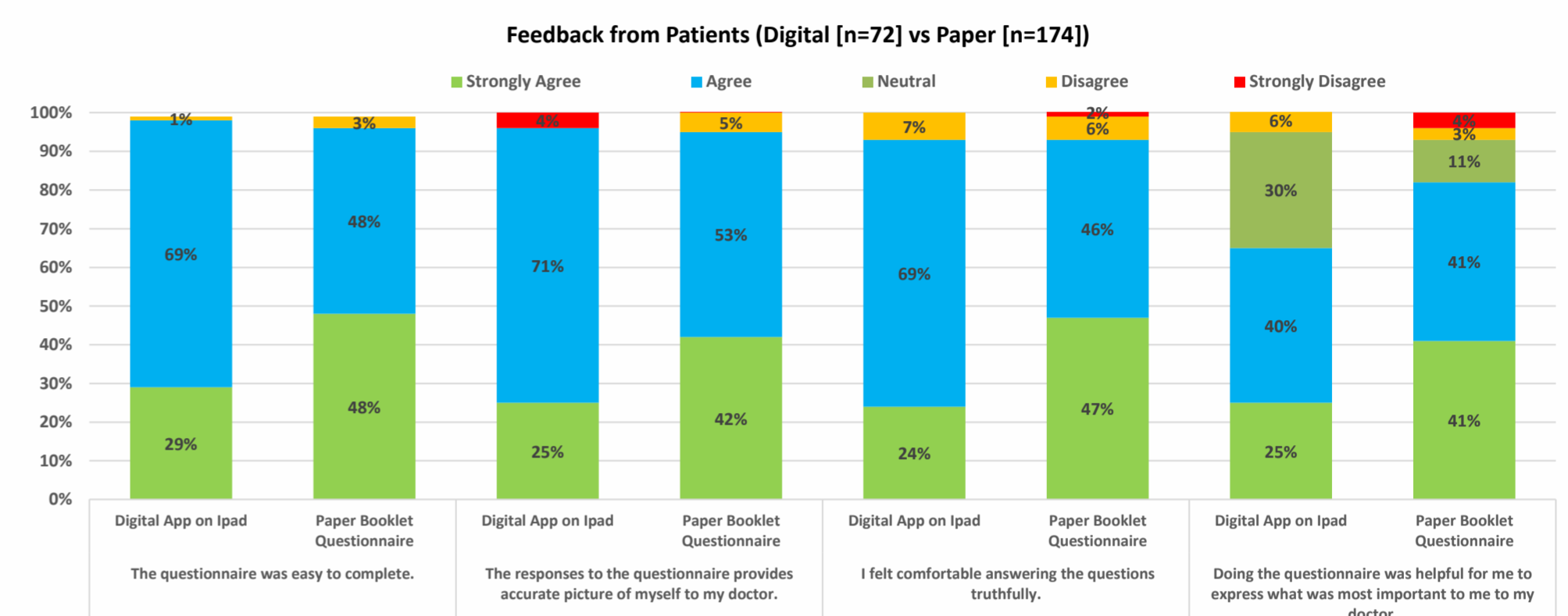


Chart 3: Adolescents gave feedback on their experience and likelihood of honest disclosures in completing the YWB questionnaire (both iPad digital version and the booklet versions). Their feedback were largely positive.

Of 246 adolescents, 98% agreed or strongly agreed that the questionnaire was easy to complete, and 95% felt it provided an accurate picture of themselves to their doctor. Additionally, 94% felt comfortable answering the questions truthfully, and 73% agreed that completing the questionnaire helped them express what was most important to their doctor.

Moreover, 95% of adolescents who used the YCA service said they would recommend it, 96% felt understood, and 97% felt they received the help they needed.

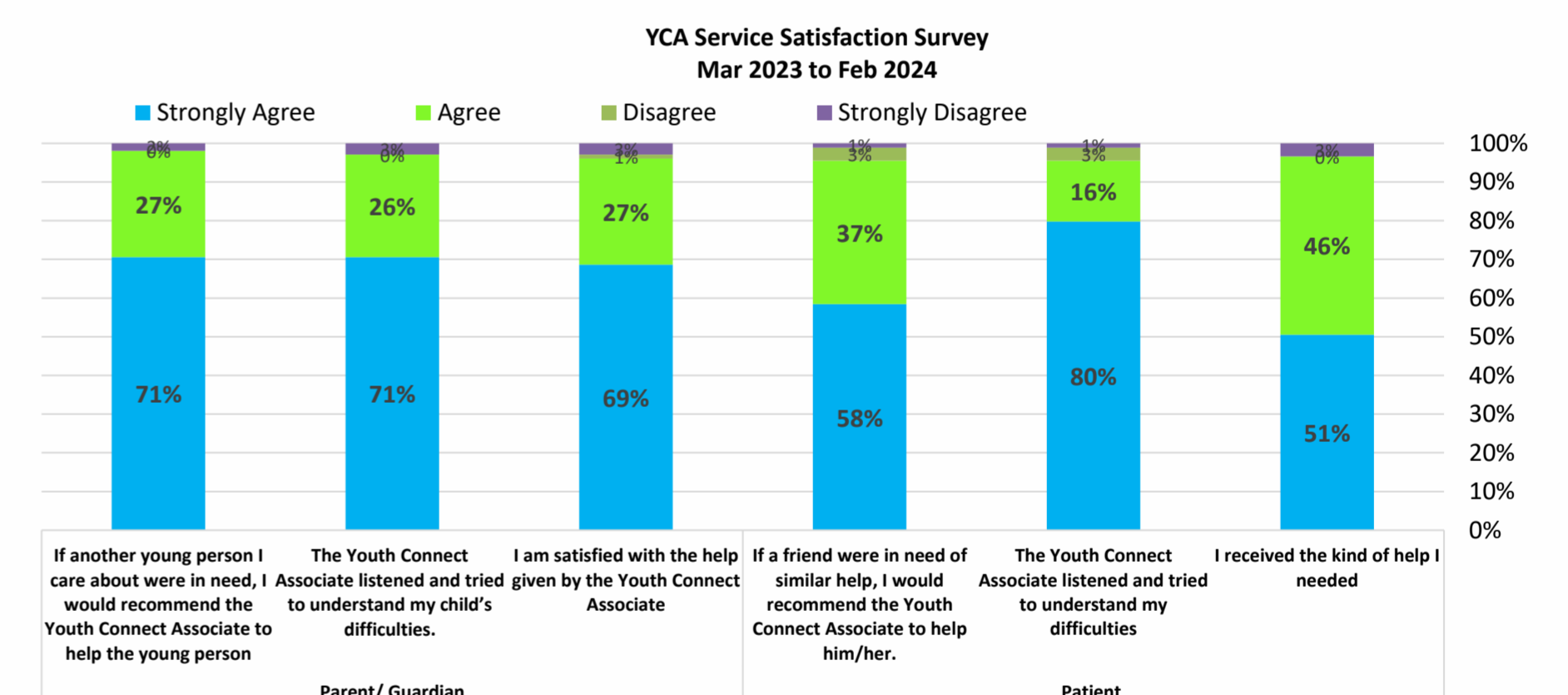


Chart 5: Adolescents and parents who received YCA service were invited to participate in YCA service patient satisfaction survey. Their experiences with YCA service were mainly positive.

Despite identifying adolescents with psychosocial issues, referrals to Medical Social Workers (MSW) and Clinical Psychologists remained stable. YCA services focus on mild to moderate difficulties, allowing strained MSW and Clinical Psychologist resources to concentrate on severe cases. This highlights YCA's role in addressing the manpower shortage and bridging gaps in social and mental health interventions.

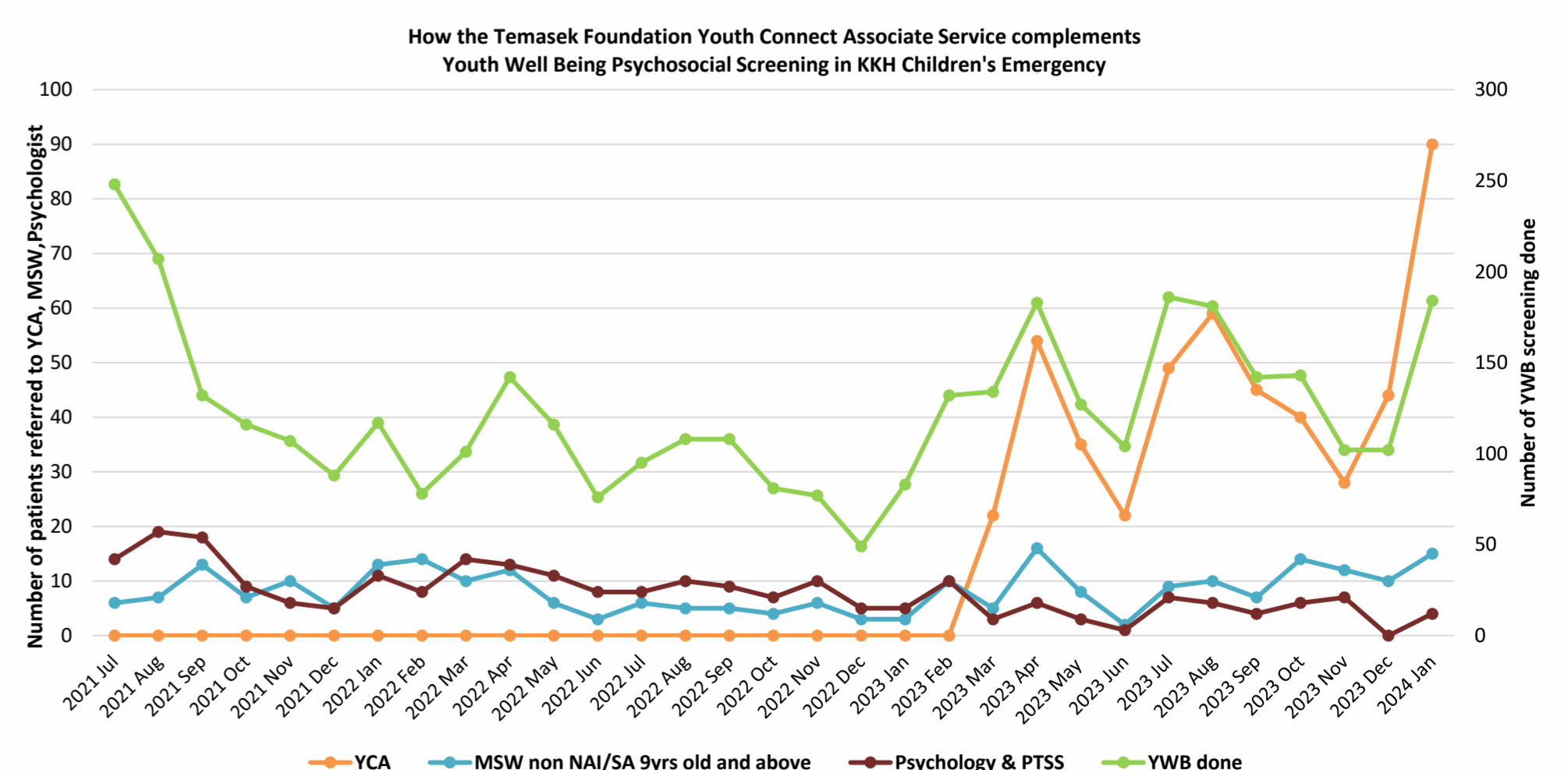


Chart 6: Since March 2023, YCA psychosocial support services (Orange line) were provided based on YWB screening outcomes.