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# Exploration of outpatient revisits of psychiatric elderly patients during the COVID-19 pandemic



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## Background

In December 2019, the first case of the novel coronavirus was discovered. The COVID-19 virus gave rise to pandemic global. Taiwan did not experience a severe COVID-19 outbreak until 2021. The Taiwan government implemented the Nationwide level 3 alert from May to July 2021. Regular revisits will keep psychiatric outpatients stable. Previous studies have found that lockdowns may worsen symptoms in psychiatric patients and reduce the utilization of medical services. Elderly patients usually had relatively stable revisits. However, during the epidemic, the revisits of elderly psychiatric patients seemed to be more affected.

## Objectives

This study explores the situations of revisits of psychiatric outpatients of different ages in Taipei with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the epidemic prevention policies in Taiwan. We also focused on the changes in revisits during the lockdown period (Figure 1).

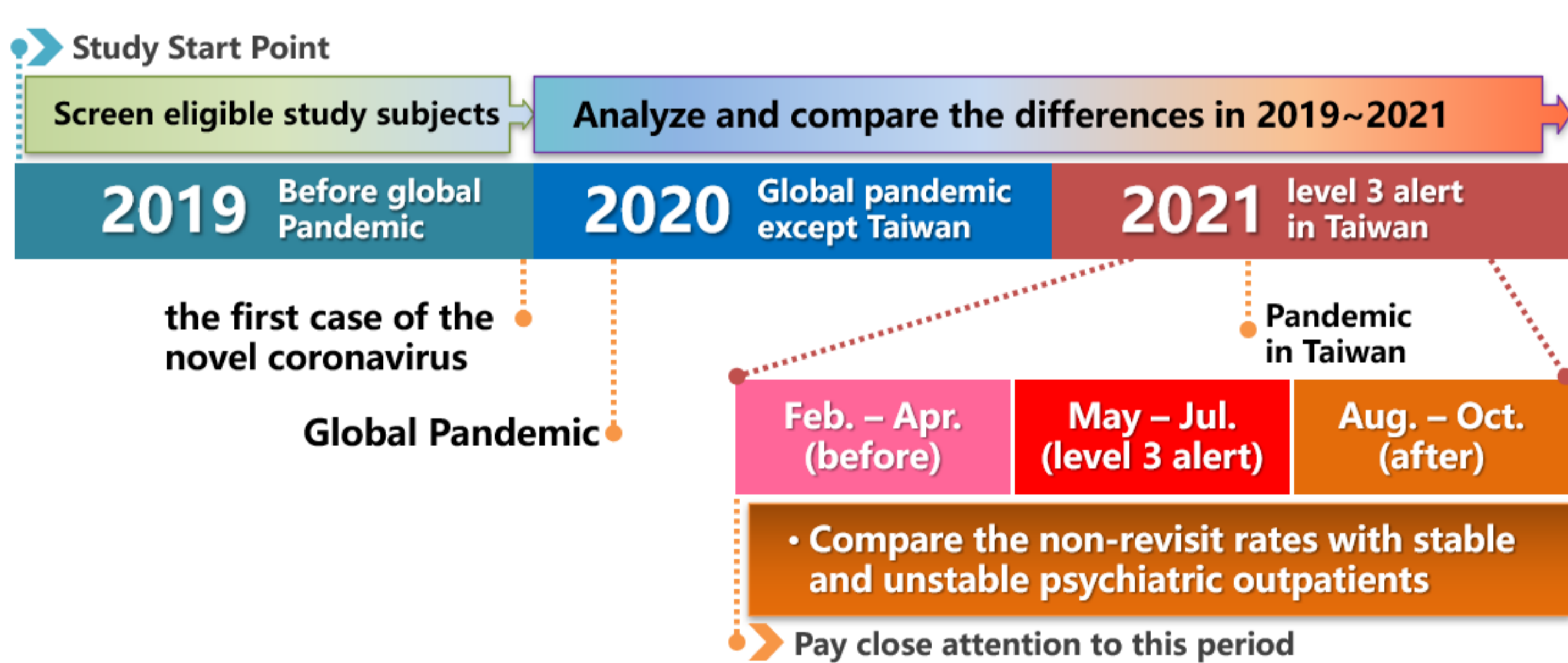


Figure 1. Timeline Variables in the Study

## Methods

Medical data were collected from the Songde Branch of Taipei City Hospital in 2019-2021. Subjects were psychiatric outpatients over 20 year-olds diagnosed with mental illness, had no records of hospitalization or emergency, and had revisited for more than 280 days in 2019 (Figure 2). We compared the stable/unstable revisits at different ages in 2020/2021, and the changes in non-revisit rates by the lockdown with different ages by the chi-square test.

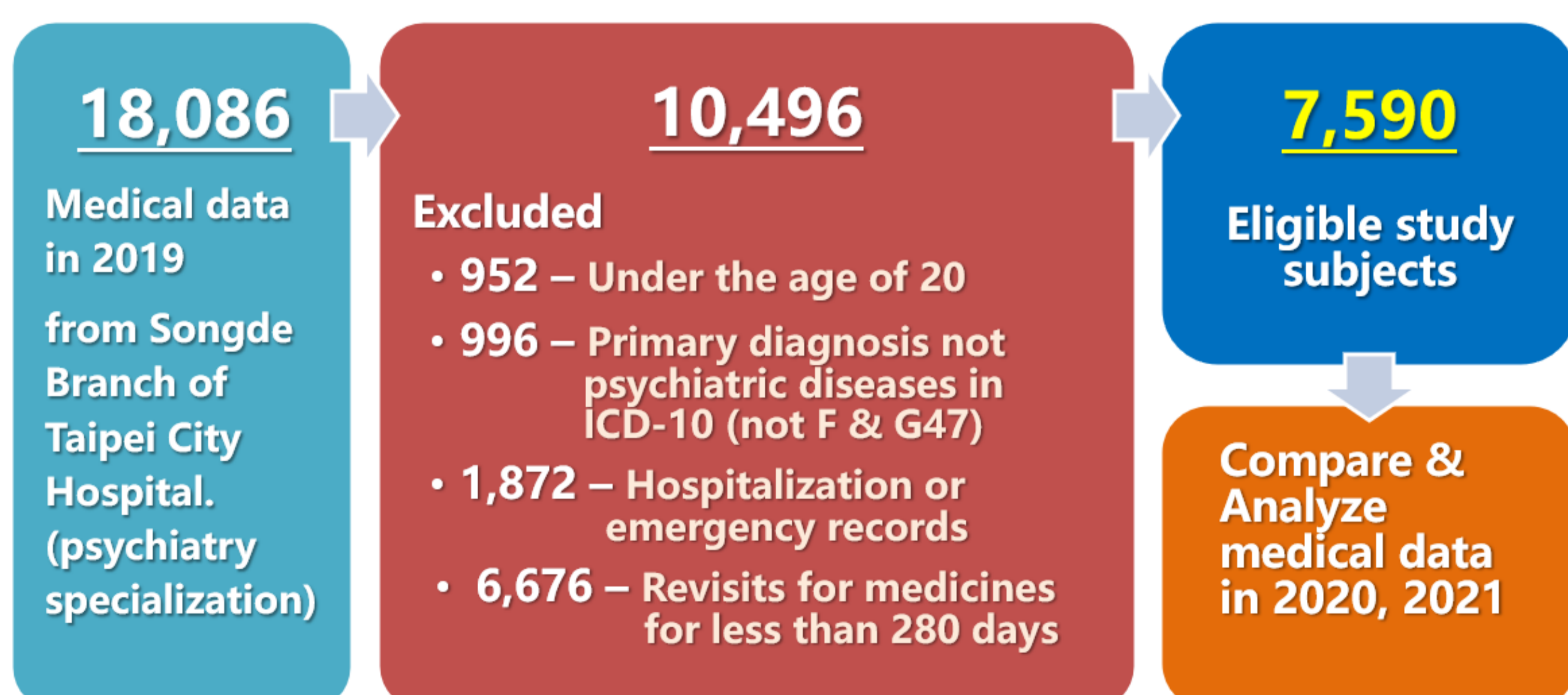


Figure 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria of eligible study subjects

## Results

Of 7,590 subjects, 4,876 (64.2%) were stable; 1,124 (18.9%) were unstable in 2021 (Table 1 & Figure 3).

Table 1. Main characteristics of psychiatric outpatients in 2019-2021 (frequency [%]).

Year	2019		2020		2021	
	Eligible subjects	Stable	Unstable	Stable	Unstable	
All	7,590 (100%)	6,012 (79.2%)	1,578 (20.8%)	4,876 (81.1%) (64.2% for 7,590)	1,136 (18.9%) (15.0% for 7,590)	
Sex						
Female	4,240 (55.9%)	3,346 (55.7%)	894 (56.7%)	2,887 (55.6%)	1,353 (56.5%)	
Male	3,350 (44.1%)	2,666 (44.3%)	684 (43.3%)	2,308 (44.4%)	1,042 (43.5%)	
Age		p<0.05	p<0.05	p<0.05	p<0.05	
20~34 years old	896 (11.8%)	638 (10.6%)	258 (16.3%)	504 (10.3%)	134 (11.8%)	
35~49 years old	2,201 (29.0%)	1,748 (29.1%)	453 (28.7%)	1,434 (29.4%)	314 (27.6%)	
50~64 years old	2,796 (36.8%)	2,323 (38.6%)	473 (30.0%)	1,945 (39.9%)	378 (33.3%)	
65 years old above	1,697 (22.4%)	1,303 (21.7%)	394 (25.0%)	993 (20.4%)	310 (27.3%)	

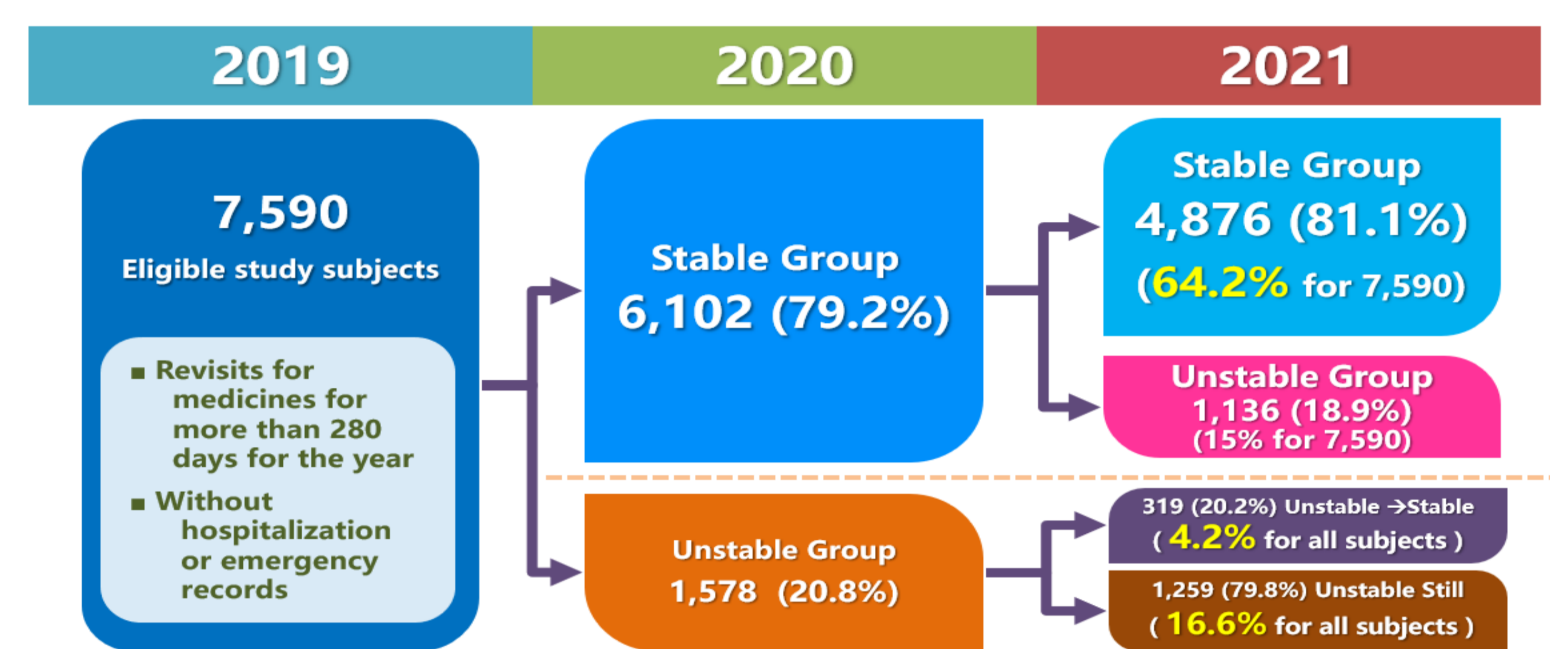


Figure 3. Timeline Variables in the Study

Among the different ages, the elders were with the significantly highest decreasing rate (18.3%, ) of stable revisit from 2020 to 2021 (Figure 4).

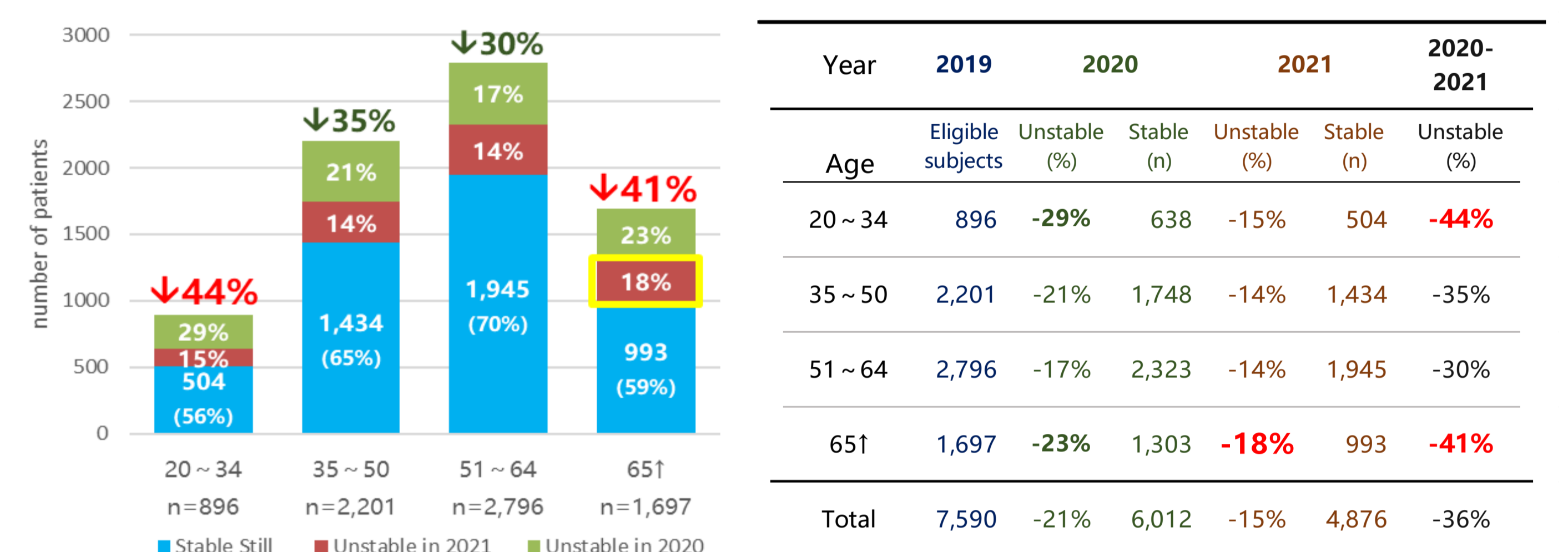


Figure 4. The change between the stable and the unstable group for the study subjects with different age distributions in three years.

As unstable ones, similar increasing trends were in non-revisit rates of all ages during the lockdown but didn't decrease after, especially for elders, whose non-revisit rate is the highest in three periods (Figure 5).

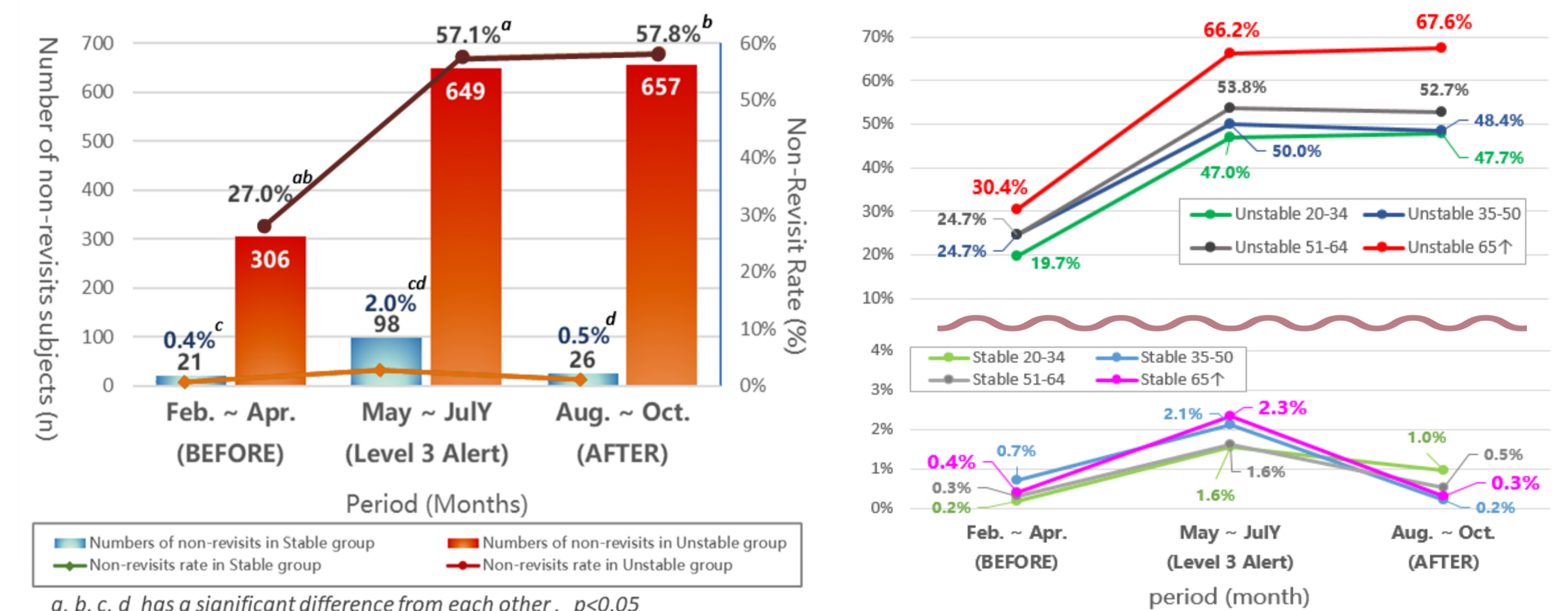


Figure 5. Non-revisit rate of the stable and the unstable group of different ages in 3 periods, during Level 3 alert.

## Conclusion

Elderly patients are usually more stable users of medical resources. However, during the three-year research observation, under the impact of the pandemic, elderly psychiatric patients had a higher rate of unstable revisits and condition changes. Especially during the level three alert period, the problems of elderly outpatients who did not revisit were even more serious. In the future, a further follow-up study on the severity of diseases and medicine of psychiatric outpatients is necessary.

