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THE IMPACT OF WILDFIRES ON MENTAL HEALTH OF RESIDENTS IN A RURAL AREA OF GREECE. A CASE CONTROL POPULATION BASED STUDY

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Introduction: Psychopathological disturbances are common in the aftermaths of a disaster. The consequences of these disorders can be long lasting. In August of 2007 an intense and destructive wildfire broke out in the Peloponnesus peninsula in Greece.

Objectives: To investigate psychological and psychiatric morbidity in individuals who had experienced severe exposure to a wildfire disaster in a part of Greece and to indentify risk factors for the post disaster psychological problems.

Aims: To investigate a broader spectrum of mid-term psychological and psychiatric morbidity in victims, to evaluate the proportion of psychopathology that could be accredited to the disaster, to estimate the association of losses with different psychological symptoms, to indentify risk factors for psychopathology.

Methods: A Cross sectional case control study of adult population (18-65 years old). Data collected among others were demographic, Symptom Checklist 90-Revised for assessment of psychological difficulties, type and number of losses.

Results: Those damnified from the disaster scored significantly higher (p< 0.05) in the symptoms of somatisation, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoia, and had significantly more symptoms (PST) and were more distressed by them (GSI) compared to controls. In addition risk factors for someone to be a psychiatric case were to be a victim from the fire, to have finished primary school, to be windowed and to have damages to his property.

Conclusions: Wildfires can cause considerable psychological symptoms in victims and there are reasons for public health policy makers to create services in order to help and improve the mental health of those affected.