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SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CORRELATES OF SUICIDE IN THE REGIONS AFFECTED BY CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR DISASTER

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Background: The Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident that occurred on 26 April 1986 was the greatest technological disaster in history. There is evidence that the accident has had a significant long-term impact on psychological well-being of the affected population. In particular, the rate of suicide has increased dramatically among the exposed population.

Aims: This study was design to examine some of the socio-demographic characteristics which might explain this rise.

Methods: A psychological autopsy study of suicides occurring in the regions affected by Chernobyl nuclear disaster between 2003 and 2007 was conducted.

Results: The suicide rate among the affected population is 3-4 times higher (95-130 per 100.000 of the population) than among general population (33 per 100.000 of the population). The risk factors for suicide among the affected population are the same as for general population. These include unemployment, low income, low education level, acute and chronic alcohol intoxication. Alcohol dependence was diagnosed in 70% of male suicides and 71.4% of female suicides. Alcohol dependence was diagnosed more frequently among men age 30-39 (81.1%) and 50-59 (80%). In the present study 72.3% of males and 62% of females were BAC-positive at the time of death. Positive BAC cases were found more frequently in men age 30-39 (86.5%); 50-59 (86.7%) and women age 30-39 (85.7%).

Conclusions: These results are consistent with previous studies suggesting that acute and chronic alcohol intoxication may function as proximal and distal risk factors of suicide.