

THE ROLE AND REACTIONS OF A MENTAL HEALTH TEAM  
INVOLVED IN THE VICTORIAN BUSHFIRE AFTERMATH\*

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SUMMARY

The reactions of a volunteer mental health team which convened in the aftermath of the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires are reported. A questionnaire designed to explore psychological and physical responses was completed by all of the 19 staff who made up the team. Using both open ended and closed questions, the questionnaire tapped such areas as motivation, goals, expectations and observations, initial and later emotional and physical reactions, fantasies and evoked memories; an evaluation of the service and the experience was also included.

Analysis of responses indicated that team members experienced considerable stress during their post-disaster work but also gained a great deal on both professional and personal levels. Sources of stress are discussed as are recommendations for their alleviation.

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