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## MENTAL HEALTH POLICY IN GREECE: IMPLICATIONS INTO PRACTICE IN THE ERA OF ECONOMIC CRISIS

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**Introduction:** Budgets allocated for mental health make up a relatively small proportion of total health expenditures, although there is an increasing burden of mental disorders.

**Objectives:** To review the mental health situation in Greece with regards to mental health policy through review of relevant literature.

**Aims:** To explore the basic implications of the economic crisis from a health policy perspective, reporting constraints and opportunities.

**Methods:** A narrative review in PubMed/Medline along with a hand search in selected Greek biomedical journals was undertaken, relevant to mental health policy.

**Results:** Greece is among the OECD countries with high health expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (9.7% of GDP in 2008) but it doesn't have a specified budget for mental health and is mostly depended in out-of-pocket expenditure (48%). The system is plagued by problems, including geographical inequalities, overcentralization, bureaucratic management and poor incentives in the public sector. The lack of cost-effectiveness and the informal payments comprise a major source of inequity and inefficiency. Uneven regional distribution of psychiatrists exists and rural areas are mostly uncovered by mental health care facilities, as well as extramural mental health units and rehabilitation places, despite the current reorganization of the whole mental health care delivery system.

**Conclusions:** The core problem with mental health services in Greece is the shrinking budget with poor financial administration consistent with inadequate implementation of mental health policy. A clear authority with defined responsibility for overall mental health policy and budgetary matters is needed.