Reviewer's report

Title: Family Functioning in the Aftermath of a Natural Disaster

Version: 2 Date: 8 January 2012

Reviewer: Gerasimos Kolaitis

Reviewer's report:

Minor Essential Revisions

The manuscript is very interesting and important in the field of post-traumatic stress, especially following a natural disaster. It is also quite original as it covers an important area i.e. family functioning of victims which is neglected and has not been adequately studied. There are some methodological problems which are clearly reported by the authors as limitations of the study in the discussion section. The statistical methods are appropriate and the writing acceptable.

The authors have studied a community sample having experienced a natural disaster and they found double, compared to normative, dysfunctioning (measured with the FAD) in the families - victims of a cyclone, 3 months after the event. The family dysfunctioning was associated with increased children’s anxiety/depression symptoms (measured with the SDQ), increased children’s age but less children’s perceived threat.

The latter “intriguing and somewhat counter-intuitive” finding is not adequately discussed in the discussion section. This could be the result of the sample selection bias as it could be that the dysfunctional families who accepted to participate in the study might have felt less threat than those who did not. This explanation would also apply to the previous finding that family dysfunctioning was not correlated with PTSD symptoms but only with internalizing problems.

Other factors such as timing of the assessment and variation in reporting source which are reported as limitations by the authors might have also influenced the results. It would be interesting for example to know children’s perceptions of family functioning. In the dysfunctional families, children’s perceived threat could be more distorted through denial and thus under-reporting the severity of the threat they experienced.

The possibility that family dysfunction preceded the disaster (one reason being the financial disadvantage) can not be excluded. Another question is about the pre-existing mental health problems of the sample and how these problems were assessed and whether are associated with family dysfunctioning and not with the natural disaster.

Parental psychopathology (following natural disasters, traffic accidents etc) is another important and increasingly studied parameter which might be correlated with family dysfunctioning but also with children’s PTSD and could shed light in
the latter. The authors could have possibly added relevant recently published works.

At page 7, please correct event (8 lines from bottom).
At page 9, please put . after the parenthesis (8 lines from the bottom of the page).

In conclusion, the manuscript is interesting, important, adding to the existing knowledge covering the neglected area of family functioning in the aftermath of a natural disaster and, despite methodological limitations, should be accepted with minor essential revisions.

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.