

TROPICAL CYCLONE OSCAR (1983)

PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS OF A FIJIAN POPULATION

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INTRODUCTION

On the basis of interview and questionnaire data, 75 rural Fijians who survived Cyclone Oscar and 64 control subjects from a nearby unaffected urban area were compared on the following measures: pre-hurricane adjustment, hurricane experience, post-hurricane adjustment, physical symptoms, and psychological functioning.

Psychosocial response to disaster has been well described by many authors (see review by Kinston and Rosser, 1974). Specific research on cyclones has also been extensive (e.g. Crashaw, 1963; Parker, 1979, Patrick, 1981). Cyclone Oscar, described here, differed in several respects from those previously investigated. The scale of the disaster was modest, for instance there was no loss of life in the village studied. The population was not homogeneous containing two races and three religious groups. Finally there had been virtually no past contact with psychological or psychiatric services.

Many previous reports were descriptive and concentrated on behaviour during the Impact or Recoil Phases (Tyhurst, 1951). This study looked at the aftermath, using objective instruments as well as clinical assessment. In addition a control group was employed.

The aim of this study was to examine psychological morbidity during the months after the cyclone. How prevalent was disturbance and did this change with time? What forms did it take? What factors were associated with good or bad outcome?