

## IMPACT OF A NATURAL DISASTER ON PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: Adjustment 14 Months After a Hurricane

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*Fourteen months after a hurricane, young children who had experienced the storm showed significantly higher anxiety and withdrawal and more behavior problems than did children who had not. Behavioral problems decreased steadily over the six months following the storm. Mothers' distress in the hurricane's aftermath was associated with the longevity of their children's emotional and behavioral difficulties.*

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On September 21, 1989, a Class IV hurricane, Hugo, struck the South Carolina coast, carrying 175 mile-per-hour winds and a tidal surge between 12 and 23 feet. The eye of the hurricane entered the mainland north of Charleston. In a nearby national forest, from 70% to 80% of all trees were destroyed. In Charleston County, 80% of all structures endured roof damage, 6,000 homes were destroyed, over 12,000 homes were rendered uninhabitable, and 65,000 people required temporary shelter (Mullins & Burbage, 1989).

Since Terr's (1981) seminal study on the effects of the Chowchilla bus kidnapping on children, several studies have documented short-term negative consequences

(Belter & Shannon, 1993; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993; Klingman, 1992; Pynoos et al., 1987; Yule & Udwin, 1991) and long-term behavioral and emotional changes (Conte & Berliner, 1987; Green et al., 1994; Honig, Grace, Lindy, Newman, & Titchener, 1993; Nader, Pynoos, Fairbanks, & Frederick, 1990; Vogel & Vernberg, 1993; Yule & Williams, 1990) among school-aged children who experience various types of trauma.

Previous research specific to natural disaster and school-aged children reveals short-term effects that include apathy and aggression (Bloom, 1986; Galante & Foa, 1986), sleep disturbances, decrease in appetite, increase in somatic complaints (Dollinger,

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