

Antidepressant and Anxiolytic Medication Use Pre and Post Cyclone Yasi In North Queensland

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Natural disasters elicit different responses, with the degree of exposure often influencing the presentation and severity of psychological events. Although the supply chain during natural disasters has been investigated, there has been little research into the effect on medication usage after natural disasters. The aim of this study was to determine whether there were significant changes in prescription rates of antidepressant and anxiolytic drugs following Cyclone Yasi and if this was affected by the extent of damage sustained by the area.

METHODS

A quantitative determination of new prescriptions of antidepressants and anxiolytics was conducted. Using data collected from regulatory authorities for the affected region, the total number of new prescriptions for these drugs was calculated for the period six months after the cyclone and compared with the same six month period in the preceding year. Two control drugs were also included to eliminate any changes in general rate of drug prescription in the affected communities.

RESULTS

Prescriptions of all antidepressant and anxiolytic drugs increased in the periods following Cyclone Yasi. There was a greater increase in prescription rates in the 14 to 54 and 55-95 year old categories in those areas that were directly hit by Cyclone Yasi (6.4%:5.2%) compared to those not directly hit areas (2.7%:3.3%).

DISCUSSION

Although the increase was less than expected, it was concluded that there is a direct correlation between the extent of exposure to the event and the degree of damage and increased rates of antidepressant and anxiolytic prescriptions.