

Epidemics in Fiji's history: Stories of Power, Resistance and Contradiction

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Abstract

This paper is a historical review of known epidemics that have afflicted Fijians since European contact in the late 1700s, with particular attention to the devastations caused by the measles epidemic of 1875 and the influenza pandemic in 1918. The impact of these outbreaks is documented in numerous archival sources, including government records, the 'Proceedings of the Council of Chiefs, the Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) files, the *Fiji Times*, and a report of the Royal Commission to investigate 'the decrease of the native population' (1896). The paper argues that despite changing historical contexts and epidemiological circumstances, official responses to disease in Fiji were underscored by assumptions of European superiority and power that ignored how non-Europeans viewed Western medicine with suspicion and colonial rules as contradictory.

Keywords: Colonialism; Depopulation; Disease; Fiji; Influenza; Measles; Quarantine

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