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Illicit Drug Markets Among New Orleans Evacuees Before and Soon After Hurricane Katrina

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Abstract

This paper analyzes illicit drug markets in New Orleans before and after Hurricane Katrina and access to drug markets following evacuation at many locations and in Houston. Among New Orleans arrestees pre-Katrina, rates of crack and heroin use and market participation was comparable to New York and higher than in other southern cities. Both cities have vigorous outdoor drug markets. Over 100 New Orleans evacuees provide rich accounts describing the illicit markets in New Orleans and elsewhere. The flooding of New Orleans disrupted the city's flourishing drug markets, both during and immediately after the storm. Drug supplies, though limited, were never completely unavailable. Subjects reported that alcohol or drugs were not being used in the Houston Astrodome, and it was a supportive environment. Outside the Astrodome, they were often approached by or could easily locate middlemen and drug sellers. Evacuees could typically access illegal drug markets wherever they went. This paper analyzes the impact of a major disaster upon users of illegal drugs and the illegal drug markets in New Orleans and among the diaspora of New Orleans evacuees following Hurricane Katrina. This analysis includes data from criminal justice sources that specify what the drug markets were like before this disaster occurred. This analysis also includes some comparison cities where no disaster occurred, but which help inform the similarities and differences in drug markets in other cities. The data presented also include an initial analysis of ethnographic interview data from over 100 New Orleans Evacuees recruited in New Orleans and Houston.

A Natural Disaster Strikes a Social Disaster: New Orleans

Much scholarship before (see Birch, 2006; Powers, 2006) and especially after Katrina (Brinkley, 2006; Daniels, 2006) has documented the extent that New Orleans was a near social disaster. While the New Orleans tourist industry, centered around the French Quarter, Superdome, and the Mardi Gras Festival, were well known and appreciated by many Americans, outside this area and other middle class neighborhoods much of New Orleans verged on being a social disaster before the hurricane (Jones-Deweever & Hartmann, 2006; Powers, 2006; Hartmann & Squires, 2006).

Starting in the 19th century, but especially in the 20th century, most neighborhoods of New Orleans were built below sea level in what were marshes (or bayous). For many years, disaster preparedness experts had predicted that the city would face devastation and severe flooding should a major hurricane strike New Orleans. Congress repeatedly did not approve funding to strengthen the city's levees (Dyson, 2006). Nearly half a million persons lived in New Orleans prior to Hurricane Katrina.

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Before Katrina, New Orleans was characterized by extreme levels of poverty and racial segregation (Hartman & Squires, 2006; Powell, Jeffries, Newhart, & Stiens, 2006). Prior to Katrina, most major governmental institutions were functioning marginally. The school system was in receivership, and police and courts were overwhelmed. Health care institutions were among the stronger, but they relied heavily upon Charity Hospital to provide care (Franklin, 2006). In the Gentilly and the Ninth Ward neighborhoods, home ownership approached 45-60% (U.S. Government, 2005), but many other people lived in public housing projects with low rental rates.

When the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina was widely reported on TV and the news, the New Orleans middle class and most low income families with cars (over half the population) had largely evacuated the city before the hurricane arrived on August 29, 2005. This evacuation included sizable proportions of police, court, health, and other governmental employees. Thus, many key personnel were not available to deal with the disaster that followed the hurricane.

Many of the city's poorest residents, predominantly African American, had no funds to leave the city and no place to go. Moreover, most of the poorest persons had rarely left New Orleans before. So, many stayed—expecting wind damage and fallen trees—which they had experienced before. When Hurricane Katrina struck on August 29, 2005, the center of the storm passed to the east of New Orleans—but destroyed many cities and communities along the coastline of Mississippi and Alabama (Brinkley, 2006). Fortunately, the levees along the Mississippi River and on Lake Pontchartrain (north of the city) did not rupture. But 12 breaches of levees on canals inside the city occurred on August 30, and about 80% of the city was flooded (Brinkley, 2006).

Flooding and Evacuation

From August 30 through September 4, 2005, thousands of persons were trapped by floodwaters (*Time*, 2005). Many persons stranded in their homes were rescued by boat, helicopter, and other means. Many persons died, and many waded through floodwaters and gathered in the Superdome and Convention Center where they were held for two to four days before evacuation buses could take them out. Water, food, and other supplies were often removed from stores. Finally, by September 5 virtually everyone was evacuated from New Orleans. Most of those evacuated were very poor before Katrina.

The Evacuee Diaspora

Thousands of persons were evacuated to other areas, primarily in the South. Houston received the largest number, but Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Dallas, Jackson, San Antonio, and a number of other cities sheltered many more. The poorest from New Orleans suddenly had to adjust to new environments (Troutt, 2007). This diaspora continues to current time (Horne, 2006). Unless the situation improves in New Orleans, many poor evacuees will likely become residents of the states where they are currently located and possibly end up on the welfare rolls in such states.

Virtually everyone was affected by the flooding and the mandatory evacuation order. The flood waters remained for nearly a month in isolated areas because the pumping system had been destroyed by the flooding. In areas that flooded, the damage was extensive for Black and White, rich and poor. Virtually every flooded housing unit had extensive mold damage; mountains of debris were created and had to be carted away. The flooding and mold made many middle and high income communities, as well as those populated by working and poor persons, unlivable.

Modest Recovery

Virtually every governmental institution—police, courts, schools, hospitals, health facilities, treatment facilities, and taxpaying businesses—have been dramatically harmed. They function at only a fraction of their pre-Katrina levels (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2007). Plans for renovations and repopulation of New Orleans continue to be a major political issue both in the city and the US. Two years after the flooding, only 50% to 60% of the New Orleans population is estimated to have returned to their homes (or were staying with others). Much of the French Quarter and business district has been or is being restored; these areas are beginning to resemble pre-Katrina appearances. Five blocks away, however, whole blocks of houses sit untouched. The city's numerous public housing projects have been boarded up and closed (Powers, 2006; Zdenek, Scott, Malone, & Gumm, 2006). Rental rates for restored housing are much higher than previously. Much of the center city and especially the Lower Ninth Ward, mainly populated by working and poor African Americans, have little or no evidence of restoration work in place. What the future holds for restoration of these neighborhoods, many of them below sea level, remains unknown.

Drug Markets in New Orleans Pre-Katrina—From ADAM Data

Although the extent of poverty, segregation; housing values, and related information is available for New Orleans, relatively little data is available about the city's extensive drug markets before Katrina. (Blumstein & Wallman, 2006; Johnson, Golub, & Dunlap, 2006; Johnson, Golub, Dunlap, Sifaneck, & McCabe, 2006). Fortunately, some excellent data is available from the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program. The ADAM program interviewed a representative sample of adult male arrestees and collected extensive information about self-reported drug use and urine test results in 20 to 35 cities. The ADAM (2003) data presented below are from 2000 through 2003 (ADAM was canceled in January of 2004) before Katrina occurred.

New Orleans was a regular reporting ADAM site during that period. Selected other ADAM sites are included for comparison. Large numbers of New Orleans evacuees were relocated to Houston and still reside there. Cleveland is a northern city about the size of and with similar demographic composition to New Orleans (pre-Katrina). Atlanta, Birmingham, Dallas, and San Antonio are other Gulf Coast cities and ADAM sites that received sizable numbers of New Orleans evacuees. Below we emphasize how similar New Orleans drug markets were to those of New York (Manhattan).

Demographics Characteristics of Arrestees

Over three quarters of arrestees in New Orleans, Atlanta, and Birmingham were African American, while only about half of New York arrestees were African American (Table 1). New York arrestees reported having a high school education (63%) at higher rates than their counterparts in New Orleans (55%) but were substantially less likely to be employed (47%). New York arrestees were more likely (47%) than those in New Orleans (36%) to report having health insurance but less likely to have housing (86% vs. 93%).

Similarities in Drug Use and Markets

A central finding is how similar the drug use rates among arrestees were in New Orleans and New York City. New York arrestees were the most likely to have positive drug tests (76%) and be at high risks of drug dependence at (44%) (see Table 2). This was higher than the national median for all sites and higher than the other comparison cities. But New Orleans was the not too distant second on these measures (71% for any drug and 37% at risk and dependence).

Significantly New York and New Orleans arrestees were below the national median for detected methamphetamine use and in self reports of alcohol use in the past 30 days.

Crack was detected as the major hard drug of abuse in both New York City (44%) and New Orleans (40%) (see Table 3), significantly higher than the national median (30%) and in the other cities. Atlanta was the highest at 48%. The number of days with crack purchase was among the highest in New York (17 days), New Orleans (14 days), New Orleans (15 days), and Houston (15 days) among crack user arrestees. Very large proportions of arrestees reported making outdoor purchases of crack in New York (86%) and in New Orleans (77%); this was about double the proportion of arrestees who reported crack purchases outdoors in some of the other comparison cities (Houston 36%). About a quarter of arrestees in New York and New Orleans reported having money and sought to purchase crack, but failed to make a buy due to observations of or concerns about police—nearly half of their Houston counterparts mentioned police as reason for failing to purchase crack.

Detected heroin use was very similar in New York (17%) and New Orleans (15%)—about three times higher than the national median and about twice that in some of the other comparison cities (Table 4). About three quarters of heroin users reported purchasing heroin outdoors. Observations of or concerns about the police were a reason that a fifth failed to make a purchase of heroin in New York and New Orleans. Crack and heroin users in both cities constituted a substantially higher proportion of arrestees than in other comparison cities or than the national median.

Marijuana use was slightly higher in New Orleans (46%) than in New York (42%), but neither site was especially higher than the national median nor the other sites. Again, the vast majority of marijuana purchases (80% in New York and 72% New Orleans) occurred outdoors, compared to about 20% in Texas cities (Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio). Failure to make a marijuana purchase due to police was higher in Houston (41%) and New Orleans (31%) than in NY (20%).

In both New Orleans and New York, over 70% of purchases of all illegal drugs were made at outdoor sites. Both cities had extensive outdoor “street” markets for heroin and crack cocaine, far higher than most other ADAM sites. Moreover, purchasing patterns and retail units appeared to be very similar among arrestees in New Orleans and New York. By contrast, Taylor and Costa (2003) report that at most sites, ADAM arrestees report phoning dealers and receiving their drugs via delivery service. New York and New Orleans arrestees less often use delivery services.¹

Thus, prior to Katrina, from 2000 to 2003, drug markets for all three major drugs (crack, heroin, and marijuana) in both cities were primarily outdoors, especially when compared with other Southern cities provided here. For each indicator in Tables 2 through 5, New Orleans and New York arrestees were more similar to each other in their illicit drug consumption and drug market participation than to the other comparison cities. These data also show that arrestees in Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio were very similar in drug consumption patterns and markets to each other, as outdoor purchases of crack, heroin, and marijuana were reported by only about a third

¹Another article in this issue documents shifts to phone delivery services by drug sellers in New York—but this will rarely include purchasers who mainly buy nickel, dime, or twenty dollars worth. Rather marijuana markets in New York appear to have bifurcated into commercial markets (sold by street sellers in \$10 and \$20 bags mainly to minority users in low income neighborhoods) and designer marijuana markets (higher potency marijuana sold in cubes for \$50 via phone delivery services to middle income (usually White or Asian) purchasers in wealthier communities) (Sifaneck, Ream, Johnson, & Dunlap, 2007). New Orleans very likely has phone delivery services—but it is doubtful that most persons who were without vehicles to evacuate before Katrina were able to patronize these services to obtain their drugs.

of the arrestees. The descriptions of drug markets suggested by the ADAM data above were echoed during interviews with evacuees describing the markets in New Orleans pre-Katrina.

Qualitative Research among New Orleans Evacuees

The following provides initial analysis of qualitative data coming from an ongoing NIDA-funded research project entitled “Disruption and Reformulation of Illicit Drug Markets among New Orleans Evacuees.” This is an entirely ethnographic project and relies upon systematic observation of the street scene in New Orleans and writing field notes based on those observations. This paper focuses upon the ways that illegal drug markets (especially for heroin, crack, and marijuana) functioned in New Orleans prior to Katrina, what happened to drug markets during the Katrina crisis, and the experience of New Orleans evacuees with drug markets at sites where they were evacuated. This project was designed as a qualitative study of illicit drug markets and relies heavily upon in-depth interviews, field notes, and focus groups to clarify what the recollections of New Orleans evacuees were. Project staff developed structured qualitative protocols (Johnson, Dunlap, & Benoit, 2007), which asked every respondent the same question(s) in the same order, but encouraged qualitative probing depending upon the person’s answers. This protocol elicited respondent reports about their participation and experience in heroin, crack, and marijuana markets before Katrina, during Katrina and flooding, and the month after evacuation. During the past year and a half, project staff have recruited and interviewed over 100 New Orleans evacuees. Trained ethnographers in New Orleans approached persons whom they observed using or selling illegal drugs to participate in the study. In Houston, staff ethnographers went to residential areas where large number of New Orleans evacuees were housed and were often referred to evacuees who used or sold various illegal drugs. The same informed consent procedures were administered in both locations; most persons approached were willing to be interviewed. About half of these have returned to and are living in New Orleans, and half were New Orleans evacuees still living in Houston when interviewed in 2006 and 2007. Those interviewed in-depth are probably not statistically representative of those involved in drug markets in New Orleans.

The following analyses provide extensive quoted material from respondents. Representative quotations are provided since similar commentary from other respondents is too extensive to be included. Questions asked by interviewers are often abbreviated.

Findings

New Orleans Pre-Katrina

This section of the paper draws from in-depth interviews and focus groups to give a picture of the pre-Katrina drug market. This section then deals with reports about how illicit drug markets functioned in New Orleans through the eyes of distributors and users. Not a single respondent mentioned difficulty in obtaining illegal drugs, although they sometimes indicated dissatisfaction with the quality or prices. Almost every respondent reported the widespread availability and open street sales of marijuana, crack, and heroin in their communities. When asked “What did drug use and sales look like in New Orleans in the month before Katrina?” the responses of Fatigue and Ms. Rose were similar to those of almost all other subjects.

Fatigue: Everything. Alcohol, marijuana, crack cocaine, cocaine. Heroin was available. Um, they got, um, what they call it? Crystal meth. They got all kind of pills. I mean, everything was available.

Ms. Rose: Ooh, they [sellers] was standin’ on the corner day and night. The cars will come and the cars will go. You see more Whites, Chinese, Blacks, male, female. They walkin’, they comin’ in all kind of cars, or they’re on bikes. It’s all day. If you stay up twenty-four/seven, you’ll see all kind of characters.

Respondents were articulate about the markets for their primary drug of use—but often also observant of other drugs being sold in their local neighborhood. Persons selling a particular drug were especially descriptive of the market for that drug. For example, Magnolia was a heroin user and Tank was a heroin seller.

Q: Before Katrina, if you wanted to get some heroin, how far would you have to go?

Magnolia: Maybe like in the next block, two blocks. Sometimes they'll be in the house or they'll have somebody outside watchin'. If they want it, they'll take and go call 'em and they'll go get it and bring it back to you. Or if you know I'm good, you can go there and get it yourself, twenty-four/seven. Yeah. And children twelve, thirteen. Sellin'. Everything. Totin' big ol' guns bigger than the police.

Tank: Oh, the heroin sales before Katrina, they were good. It was a lot of money in it and the sales was like... They were good. They was like accumulatin'. They was makin' a lot of money. On the average day, with heroin, a person could make anywhere between fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars a day.

The marijuana market was also described by marijuana users and sellers. Nicky was solely a marijuana user, who purchased nickel and dime bags of marijuana. He indicates the importance of middlemen.

Nicky: Say like the project right across the street. You just walk in there, tell 'em what you need; they go get it, bring it back to you. [Get it] In the hallways. Driveways, mostly.

Q: And would they hold the product on 'em or would they have to go get it for you?

Nicky: They would go get it for you. It was packaged, what they would call a dime bag. packaged [in] little sandwich bags or whatever. And quantity was like real high.

The market for crack cocaine was somewhat more secluded, but still easily accessible.

Q: So tell me a little bit about what the market looked like. [If] you wanted to score some crack cocaine, what would you have to do?

Bright: You just go back in Callio project and just pass. Somebody gonna stop you. They're gonna let you know what's happenin'. Run up to your car. [Tell them] I'm lookin' for some crack or rocks. Rocks, that's what I would say. [They would say] I got it. I got the big ones.

Q: How much money would you normally have when you went out looking?

Bright: Fifty, sixty dollars.

Q: And you would spend all of that on crack cocaine?

Bright: Each day. Right.

While the markets for marijuana, heroin, and crack were most often described and elaborate explanations provided, some subjects reported involvement with markets including a wide range of other illicit substances. Flip referred to prescription opioid misuse and redistribution, Fleetwood to methamphetamine markets.

Flip: Before Katrina, it was a heroin-dominant scene. So was methadone, OxyContin, a lot of pills. But before the storm. The pain clinics were starting to get pushed down on by police. So they were starting to kind of dimmer out. I knew a lot of guys that would go to several doctors within a week. And they were selling [pain pills].

Fleetwood: The crystal meth was mostly in the white neighborhoods. Like I lived on Magazine at the time and it was more whites around there. They was always asking

me about if I knew where to score meth. I mostly sold a lot of crack and powder cocaine. When I was in the French Quarter [had access] to crystal meth and when I got that connection I would go back to the neighborhood and up the price [of methamphetamine sold to whites].

Ecstasy was often mentioned as one of many drugs available in selected places in New Orleans and was mainly reported as a White drug. But Ms. Toya reported that she and other Blacks were using it—suggesting that the market for X-pills (as commonly referenced) was expanding among the African-American population.

Ms. Toya: Heroin, Ecstasy pills, Valiums; Vicodins, Percocets. They would take anything just to get high. Ecstasy used to be a white thing, too.

Q: What about in, um, a month before Katrina? Were black people doing it, too?

Ms. Toya: Oh, yeah. [Laughs] Yeah. I guess black people just took over Ecstasy. Yeah, I done did it before. I guess it was a party thing. New Orleans is a party city. So you gonna always have fun. And I guess that just make you have more fun, make you smoke more weed, whatever. [It] keep you up. It have me chillin'.

Cough medicine (over the counter codeine) was legally available. SU was one of the few respondents who noted that some of his counterparts were using “syrup” and equated such consumption as similar to heroin use.

SU: Any drug that you want is available, was available. Crack, weed, um, pills, syrup. I hear these young guys would go and buy this thing called syrup and mix in a drink. I told 'em, is just another form of heroin. They would tend to sit around and, and classify the guys who were snortin' heroin as bein' vies [victims]. But they're addicts, too, and just don't realize it. They're addicts, too, out there drinkin' syrup.

Before the hurricane and flooding of New Orleans, the ADAM data and reports from respondents in both New Orleans and Houston reported that illicit drug markets were very accessible. Most illegal drugs were reported to be easily located and purchased at low retail unit prices (\$5, \$10, \$20) and were usually purchased on the street or some other quasi-public settings (alleyways, cars, driveways, parks, hallways, project passages).

Illicit Markets During Katrina and the Flooding of New Orleans

After describing pre-Katrina drug markets, subjects were asked a series of questions about what happened during the Katrina Hurricane and about the week (August 30 to September 5, 2005) when New Orleans was flooded and eventually evacuated. All respondents present in New Orleans had anguished stories to tell about how they coped during that time, but which are beyond the focus of this paper.

Respondents were also asked about their participation in drug markets during this week. A number of respondents reported that they prepared themselves before the hurricane. They bought their preferred drugs to help them until after the storm when they expected things would return to normal. Many related that they had been through hurricanes before and thus stayed in New Orleans when other family members and neighbors left. They had no idea that the hurricane would result in the flooding of their homes. One male seller related that he stayed home so that no one would break into the house and steal his drug supply. Several subjects reported that they had the means to evacuate before the hurricane, so they were not in New Orleans that week.

Several subjects reported not being interested in obtaining or using drugs during this week because they were so concerned about surviving the difficult situations they were in. When asked whether they had used or purchased drugs during the hurricane or flooding, they reported

nonuse but eventually disclosed that they had used marijuana or blunts. Sam was a crack seller who used marijuana. He reported smoking (blunts) at a party until 3:00 a.m. on August 30, slept until 10:00 a.m., and was awakened by water. He reported:

Sam: No. Honestly, my mind wasn't [laughs], it wasn't even focused on purchasing drugs. I was tryin' to get outta there.

Q: Were you able to purchase drugs in the same area?

Sam: No. Not when Katrina hit. Because basically we was lookin' to get the hell from outta there. We wasn't worryin' about sellin' drugs. I have too many kids to be worryin' about that. I was tryin'. to get somewhere stable for me and my kids.

Q: Okay. You didn't have any crack?

Sam: No.

Q: And you couldn't get any.

Sam: No. [But used] Marijuana. Blunts, yeah. The blunt wraps. I ain't had no pipes because I don't mess with crack.

Several reported purchasing their drugs as the storm approached and then used it during the week of the flooding, but without making new purchases.

Q: Were you able to purchase any drug right before Katrina?

Ms. Sheila: Yes. Marijuana. You needed it for to stimulate your mind. I might not see marijuana no more. That might have been my last tree [marijuana]. Oh, well, I still had a lot of my neighbors in the neighborhood that didn't leave. So the young people, like they hung around. So I was able to get it.

Hal: I got the weed from the East and went in the Sixth Ward. Before the storm we had a party. We got the weed from the East and had the party in the East.

Q: Now, the day of Katrina, were you able to buy drugs during Katrina?

Hal: We had it. [Laughs.] We had just weed. [But no X pills, no crack.] We had weed saved up in a cake box. Like because we had a birthday cake. It was somebody's party. And we had weed in the cake box, so we was already straight.

Goldie: Yeah. I ain't had nothin' but I was low when I left, so I had an ounce.

Q: An ounce [of marijuana]. You bring anything else with you?

Goldie: My pills, my medication. Yeah.

Several mentioned the difficulty of getting around New Orleans due to flooding and difficulty finding connections they knew.

CJ: None. I already had a little somethin', you hearin' me. I had like a half a ounce, you hearin' me. I ain't really fucked with it. And I ain't know nobody around there. So we just had the little weed and went and got some 'gars [cigars] from the store. Hell, no! Because it was just like Katrina. I can't go way Downtown and be like, give me some weed. Fuck, everything flooded and shit. I can't go ride around. You had to go walk somewhere. And we ain't know nobody. But I already had weed. And by the time we finished that weed, we was in Houston.

A few reported being able to make purchases, but this was less common than maintaining and more slowly using the limited supplies during the flooding week.

Bridget: Yeah. I had slowed down, you know, because I couldn't get to it [marijuana]. My boyfriend's son-in-law, he was givin' it to me. [Not] givin' me that much because

he told me to stay focused on what I was doin'. Because we didn't know when it was gonna come rescue us or what. Had to save what you [we] had.

Goldie2: They was still sellin' during Katrina. Well, not when we was in the hotel, no. But like when we got out the hotel. My niece was drivin' and I said, I know them. Yeah, let me holla at 'em. Bang. I get me a twenty. It was crack. That's all.

Others reported being able to obtain supplies via burglary or theft from drug sellers who had left New Orleans but left supplies of drugs in their homes.

Elroy: I was able to obtain heroin and cocaine during the disaster of Katrina. I did [purchase] at first. We saw that the dealer had left, him and his family was rescued by a boat. Some friends and I broke into his apartment and retrieved the drugs that we found, heroin and cocaine. I bought [got] about a hundred dollars that day.

Q: How many days were you in there before you broke into his apartment?

Elroy: I was there the same day. I broke in that same day.

Tedy: Yeah. Yeah, I got my crack. They were selling crack while the hurricane was goin' on. Some people, they was sellin' it when they got to the [Super]Dome. Now, when I got to the Dome, I just decided not to smoke no more. I, I did clean time for about sixteen days. So I didn't have nothin' to use. When I got to the Dome, a guy did purchase some crack for me. But I chose just not to use it. And I know I couldn't be able to leave out of that Dome to go get it from nowhere else. So I just decided not to use. When I came here to Houston, it's a new city, so I just really did clean time for like sixteen days. Until I got me and my kids back stable.

Q: Okay. You were able to purchase drugs in the Dome.

Tedy: Yeah.

Some respondents reported that prices of drugs increased substantially during the flooding week, but it is less clear that they were able to sell their product for the prices alleged.

Baby: No, it was still the same weed. But the storm it changed. People started taxin'. Charging more. Like once the storm hit, after I done smoked all my weed and popped my pill. People was outside with drugs. But they was tryin' to sell 'em high, like a nickel bag of weed for twenty-five dollars and stuff. A pill for thirty dollars.

Q: Did the, did people have twenty-five dollars? So they could purchase it?

Baby: I had it, too.

A number of persons reported that they were able to purchase what they wanted, although the prices were reported to be higher than pre-Katrina. Some reported they were unable to purchase their drug of choice, some resorted to buying pills. Others reported they could find their drug but had to go to other areas to acquire it. The overall impression is that illicit drug markets were considerably suppressed during the hurricane and flooding of New Orleans, but were not entirely eliminated. Because several persons had purchased marijuana before the hurricane, they could probably get by with lower levels of use.

Drug Markets at Evacuation Sites

This section of the paper examines illicit drug markets, with a special focus upon respondent's perceptions of drug markets at their evacuation sites. New Orleans evacuees were sent to many different communities across the U.S. and may have been moved several times during the 30 days after evacuation. Several subsequently returned to New Orleans where they were interviewed in 2006 and 2007. Many subjects were initially evacuated to Houston, and placed

in FEMA-(Federal Emergency Management Administration) supported apartments. Most have remained in Houston where they were recruited and interviewed. The analysis begins with those initially sent to locations other than Houston.

One major theme was that several drug consumers reported not using or seeking, their preferred drugs at initial evacuation sites. This choice of “nonuse” was motivated in part by the need to deal with the many other problems and concerns with family following evacuation. Others reported trying to start a new way of living or objected to the quality and/or price of drugs there. But those who did not resume use at the evacuation site were generally clear that they probably could have obtained drugs at these locations.

Q: At your location in Henderson, Kentucky, were you able to find marijuana to purchase?

Nicky: No. I heard about places where it was, but then I had moved from here to across somewhere else, which kind of gave me time to like try to wean myself off to where I can try to start me a new life.

Q: Okay. So did you use drugs at all while you were in Kentucky?

Nicky: No, I didn't. No, I could have found 'em if I could have left, if I would have left the camp. But it was just time for a change

Governor: And by the time I got to Alexandria, yeah, I had one joint left.

Q: Did you have to make a connection in Alexandria to be able to get more stuff?

Governor: No, no, no. I wasn't interested because I had heard so many guys saying they was buyin' stuff but it wasn't good. I had just heard from here, but I didn't know the guys. And I didn't much worry about it.

Q: How was the drug scene different in the (evacuation) site?

Twist (marijuana user went to Cleveland): It was pretty much the same, except for more people were open with it. Like we wasn't bad. Like anywhere you go, they don't really crack down on people that smoke weed. Crack was big and another big thing was wet, embalming fluid. If you go in different neighborhoods, where it's urban, all of it's pretty much the same. You still see people standing outside. You still see crackheads walking around. You still can see people standin' on the corner smokin' weed, sittin' on their porch smokin' weed, drinking. Oh, the quality was better. [Laughs] Because the stuff down here sucks. Weed down here ain't right. It's shitty. If you smoke weed, you need to go back up north, up to the east coast, to the west coast.

Some reported reservations about accessing drug sellers and markets that were different than those in New Orleans. The absence of street sellers, and need to make a connection with privatized sellers was mentioned as a reason not to purchase or use.

Q: Was the drug scene around Baton Rouge, was that different from New Orleans?

Baby: Yeah, it was different. Because it was like mostly in Baton Rouge you had to go get it from people. They did it over the phone, go in the houses, gettin' it out houses. They didn't really, you know, play the open air on the aves (avenues). No street slingers [sellers]. Yeah. You had to have connects, to know people to get drugs. I saw a couple of people, but I didn't really entertain it, you know, because that's new people, new place. I don't really know what I'm doin'. If I was out there a little longer, I probably could have, you know, hook up with some of the people.

Q: You couldn't find any weed or you couldn't connect?

Baby: I couldn't really, I didn't really get no weed from nobody there. I didn't get none.

But most subjects who wanted to use drugs were able to make connections rapidly and with little difficulty regardless of the evacuation site.

Q: Were you able to make a drug connection in California?

Ms. Toya: Yeah. Well, when I first got out there and I got off the plane, I went to my aunt's. And I went to the store and I seen a Jamaican. And a Jamaican had some and that was my connect from there. I asked him. And he just said, "yeah, you're not the police, huh?" "No, I'm not the police; I just want somethin' to smoke." He sold me a twenty-dollar bag. It's not regular weed. It's more like cush.

Q: Okay. What were you able to get at LaPlace?

June: Crack. Crack cocaine.

Q: And how often did you use crack cocaine once you got to LaPlace?

June: Hmm, every chance I could. Every day. Until I don't have nothin' left. I stayed out there for about two weeks. I came back down here to New Orleans. And things were slow, slow, slow. It was chaos. I was disgusted. I was drinkin' more than anything.

The Astrodome as a Refuge

A large number of New Orleans evacuees were initially bused to the Astrodome in Houston, where they were provided with showers, food, sleeping facilities, and a wide range of medical and social services. This was a heroic effort to deal with the aftermath of a disaster, probably involving close to 100,000 impoverished persons, within a week or two. Several of our New Orleans evacuees had been evacuated to Houston and specifically to the Astrodome. These respondents indicated that staff at the Astrodome searched persons for weapons and drugs, and even excluded persons who smelled of alcohol, but they were not resentful nor did they feel disrespected.

Felicia: Don't know what type of drug he was on, but that's when they start enforcin', checkin' us thoroughly. If you had liquor on your breath, you couldn't come into ... (Astrodome). They smell any kind of alcohol. And they scan you, see was any drugs on you. You couldn't come into the center. You couldn't go in the shelter.

Although not specifically probed about what happened (or not) at the Astrodome, many subjects reported being well treated by the persons doing the emergency triaging and referrals located there.

Q: Okay. What about the Astrodome?

Law Street: Oh man! It was...everybody...it was like a family. Everybody had loved ones and everybody was getting help there and stuff. You know and it was so...you walk around in there, man, and you seen sad faces. You can feel so bad you just want to reach out and touch some body. That was the time for New Orleans people to stick together and people opened their hearts out, mostly like volunteers that came in and helped people and that was real nice. God was good to do that. I must say that.

Q: Were they having any problems about drug issues or anything inside the Dome?

Congress: No, not that I know of. No.

Q: Okay. Were you able to purchase any drugs while you was there?

Congress: No, none. Not one.

Q: Now when you got to the Astrodome in Houston did you still have marijuana left?

MaryJane: I was out but Chris had some for me. He had my back up. Yeah. Well he didn't smoke. He kept it for me. He always had some stashed for me because he knew how moody I got when I didn't have it.

Q: At the Astrodome how often did you use marijuana then?

MaryJane: I didn't use it that much. (Laughter) I didn't know how them laws would be and I was out of the chaos. I got down to the norm and obeyed them laws [rules of the Astrodome].

Several subjects reported taking advantage of the medical, social, and treatment services offered at the various shelters to which they were sent.

Hollywood (went to San Antonio): I went to the doctor, and they asked you everything, and I let 'em know that I was sick, that I'm a heroin user and I go to methadone clinic; I showed 'em my methadone card. Then when I showed 'em the card, they took and gave me a prescription for the methadone pills. They got me in the clinic the next week.

The Drug Markets Outside The Astrodome

Despite being quite free of drugs inside the Astrodome and other shelters in Houston, illicit drug markets were very accessible within walking distance according to several respondents. Only a few subjects, like Chuck, did not seek out their preferred drugs. More New Orleans evacuees reported that various drugs were very accessible in Houston.

Q: After you left the Astrodome, weren't [you] trying to get drugs then.

Chuck: No. No. I was just trying to get situated.

Magnolia: It [drugs] came to you. It came to you. Soon as you get off the bus, whassup N.O.? You know what I'm sayin'. Open arms.

Q: Okay. Did you have to learn a different language to ask them for specific things?

Magnolia: No. No, they was learnin' off of us. We'll be like, "whassup?" Where the dope at? They be like, who? I say, where the dope at? So they think we talkin' about crack. So we're like, "where the heroin at?" So it was like in one spot, like in one, in the little Third Ward there, it's like they got a store here.

Q: Okay. So you never had a problem [getting heroin]?

Magnolia: No. We had met a guy that had a cell phone. So we'll just call him. We'll call him and he'll come and meet us on Kirby and Main and bring us whatever we want.

Q: Around the Astrodome was the drug scene the same as in New Orleans?

Law Street: Then when I came here to Houston, it started right here so I kept my habit up right here in Houston. I continued on doing what I do best. I know a couple of guys I had met from Houston. I used it ever since September when I came in from New Orleans with the storm.

Law Street: They had a lot of police around there but that didn't stop nobody from doing their thing. Everybody was trying to [sell]. If you seen a police they still making their sales. You can't never stop a dope dealer or nothing from transacting their dope. I mean that is a job. I'm here to tell everybody! That is a job! That is all around the world!

Almost everywhere New Orleans evacuees were sent, they reported relatively vibrant drug markets, especially for marijuana. Those sent to smaller towns and cities, reported that heroin and cocaine were less available. A minority reported that drugs were available at the evacuation site, but they did not seek or purchase them. Some waited several days or weeks before seeking out and using their preferred illicit drugs. All were aware that illicit markets and sellers could be located with little difficulty at their evacuation site.

Some New Orleans evacuees had to adjust to having few street sellers. They needed to ask around and locate connections who could make drug transactions or learn how to make connections via telephone and delivery services. Either the drug [sellers] came to them or they were able to find drug suppliers with few problems. Most observed that drug markets seemed similar regardless of where they went. They anticipated interacting and making drug connections in the future.

Conclusions

This paper analyzed existing data on illicit drug markets in New Orleans, to ascertain the impact of Katrina upon New Orleans evacuees. In New Orleans, the flooding of most neighborhoods and mandatory evacuation of the entire citizenry was a disaster for every citizen. Most governmental functions (police, the criminal justice system, education, health/hospitals, etc.) were severely disrupted and are only beginning to function with some regularity in 2007 (two years after the hurricane). The impact of this disaster will persist for many years into the future. The ADAM data (2000 to 2003) documented that prior to Katrina, New Orleans had among the highest proportion of arrestees involved in crack use and markets among southern cities and was only slightly lower than in Manhattan. Moreover, New Orleans arrestees were much more likely to be detected as heroin users (15%) and as participants in heroin markets than in Houston (7%) or other southern cities—and nearly as likely as Manhattan arrestees (17%). New Orleans was very much like Manhattan because 70% or more of arrestees reporting illegal drug use reported purchases from outdoor settings; in all other southern cities only about a third of drug using arrestees reported outdoor purchases.

Preliminary findings are provided from a major ethnographic study, in both New Orleans and Houston. Prior to Katrina, almost every respondent described the illicit markets in New Orleans as very public—as indicated by the ADAM data. Numerous persons were reported to be selling several different illegal drugs in almost every neighborhood, for low retail unit prices (nickel, dime, twenty), at any time of day or week. Almost every subject reported that they could purchase marijuana, heroin, or crack within a short distance of their home or have it delivered to them by a middleman. Many subjects reported being very active sellers of these illicit drugs before Katrina.

Just prior to the hurricane, several subjects reported making drug purchases and acquiring stashes for use in the aftermath. Some subjects reported parties and using drugs during the storm. All were dismayed when they were flooded. While making their way to higher ground, they often took a drug stash. Several marijuana users reported that they managed to consume more slowly than usual and so had some supplies when they were evacuated a few days later.

Many subjects reported that they had not used drugs and were focused upon surviving the terrible situation in New Orleans before evacuation. Only a few subjects reported that they had used drugs at the Superdome, but many reported that drug use was common there. Several reported rumors of rape, murder, and gang rights in the Superdome that were later found to be unsubstantiated and widely exaggerated by the mass media. It appears that the flooding of New Orleans substantially disrupted the city's flourishing drug markets but did not end them

entirely. Those persistent enough to locate and obtain drugs could use them or sell them, but probably less frequently than they did before Katrina.

During the first month after evacuation, New Orleans evacuees were sent to various locations around the U.S. and many to Houston. Evacuees sent to locations other than Houston reported observations of local drug markets. Several New Orleans evacuee drug users reported not using or seeking out their primary drugs; all were confident that they could have obtained drugs at those sites. Evacuees often reported that drug sales at evacuation sites were not as open and public as in New Orleans. Those seeking drugs, however, were able to rapidly locate connections at local stores, via cell phones, and/or get delivery services in order to purchase their drugs at evacuation sites.

Subjects who were evacuated to the Astrodome in Houston were quite pleased with the reception and services they obtained there. They typically reported that alcohol or drugs were not being used in the Astrodome and that it was a supportive environment where New Orleans evacuees could recover and feel like a family. These same New Orleans evacuees also reported that when they went outside the Astrodome, they were often approached by middlemen and drug sellers. Those seeking drugs were often able to make connections and drug purchases in Houston.

Limitations

This analysis has provided the best available data regarding drug use and market data among New Orleans residents. Good statistical data about drug markets (other than the ADAM data cited here) in New Orleans before, during, and after Katrina is entirely unavailable. Likewise, the ethnographic approach was limited to recruiting active users and sellers of illegal drugs (excluding nonusers of such drugs). Since the number of illicit drug users/sellers remains unknown, no claims of representativeness as in a probability based sample is claimed. The ethnographers have systematically varied the neighborhoods of recruitment and sought out users/sellers of different drugs so as to capture the variability in experiences of residents who have returned to New Orleans as well as evacuees who have remained in Houston.

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Table 1
Demographics of Arrestees in Selected Cities ADAM 2000-2003 (Adult Male Arrestees Only)

	Ethnicity			Conventionality Indicators			
	Black	White	Latino	Employed	HS Educ	Health Insured	Housed
National Median All Sites	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
New Orleans	80.4%	16.6%	2.0%	62.0%	54.9%	36.0%	93.1%
New York (Manhattan only)	51.1%	9.7%	33.7%	46.9%	63.2%	46.8%	86.0%
Houston	38.1%	22.6%	35.6%	74.3%	67.0%	37.5%	93.4%
Cleveland	73.6%	18.0%	5.0%	59.1%	62.8%	38.9%	91.5%
Other Gulf Coast ADAM Sites							
Atlanta	77.7%	12.7%	4.8%	61.2%	70.1%	40.3%	84.9%
Birmingham	76.1%	20.8%	1.3%	62.8%	70.0%	41.1%	93.8%
Dallas	43.6%	22.1%	30.4%	63.1%	68.3%	35.7%	94.4%
San Antonio	11.7%	14.8%	72.0%	71.0%	60.6%	32.7%	94.6%

Source: Golub computed from a combined ADAM data set.

* National Median data cannot be computed for this variable.

Table 2
Drug Tests and Dependence Among Arrestees in Selected Cities ADAM 2000-2003 (Adult Male Arrestees Only)

Urine Tat Results						
NIDA 5 Drugs						
	Any	Multiple	Methamphetamine	Alcohol Use Past 30 Days	Risk of Drug Dependence	
National Median All Sites	65.0%	21.3%	2.3%	51.5%	37.6%	
New Orleans	70.6%	25.8%	1.0%	43.2%	36.9%	
New York (Manhattan only)	75.5%	25.4%	0.2%	34.7%	43.9%	
Houston	56.3%	16.6%	0.9%	43.2%	28.2%	
Cleveland	70.5%	23.8%	0.5%	51.3%	37.7%	
Other Gulf Coast ADAM Sites						
Atlanta	70.1%	19.7%	1.7%	42.9%	37.6%	
Birmingham	64.4%	19.3%	0.6%	48.2%	31.7%	
Dallas	57.9%	18.6%	4.1%	45.6%	32.7%	
San Antonio	55.6%	20.0%	2.3%	52.1%	28.2%	

Source: Golub computed from a combined ADAM data set.

Table 3
Crack Use Among Arrestees in Selected Cities ADAM 2000-2003 (Adult Male Arrestees Only)

Selected ADAM Site	Crack Market Indicators					
	Cocaine Positive	30 Day Use	Days w/\$ Buy	Outdoor \$ Buy	Fail Buy, Police	
National Median Alt Sites	29.7%	15.2%	*	*	*	*
New Orleans	40.3%	18.3%	14.0	76.7%	27.9%	
New York (Manhattan only)	43.8%	20.0%	17.1	85.6%	23.7%	
Houston	30.0%	12.3%	14.7	36.4%	49.2%	
Cleveland	35.9%	20.7%	12.3	68.0%	25.2%	
Other Gulf Coast ADAM Sites						
Atlanta	48.0%	25.2%	15.3	53.2%	30.1%	
Birmingham	33.7%	15.5%	11.9	34.3%	28.3%	
Dallas	30.6%	13.4%	13.6	29.6%	34.2%	
San Antonio	28.0%	4.1%	10.8	27.7%	26.4%	

Source: Golub computed from a combined ADAM data set.

* National Median data cannot be computed for this variable.

Table 4
Heroin Use Indicators Among Arrestees in Selected Cities ADAM 2000-2003 (Adult Male Arrestees Only)

Selected ADAM Site	Morphine Positive	30 Day Use	Heroin Market Indicators			Fail Buy, Police
			Days w/\$ Buy	Outdoor \$ Buy	Fail Buy, Police	
National Median All Sites	5.5%	3.9%		*	*	
New Orleans	15.3%	12.8%	18.7	70.6%	22.2%	
New York (Manhattan only)	16.9%	15.1%	19.5	80.0%	21.5%	
Houston	6.5%	0.9%				
Cleveland	4.4%	3.5%	17.1	52.5%	17.7%	
Other Gulf Coast ADAM Sites						
Atlanta	2.9%	1.6%	16.7	55.1%	15.2%	
Birmingham	7.9%	1.0%				
Dallas	6.0%	2.7%	19.5	21.4%	19.5%	
San Antonio	9.2%	6.0%	18.9	22.4%	18.7%	

Source: Golub computed from a combined ADAM data set.

* National Median data cannot be computed for this variable.

Note: Blanks indicate fewer than 25 cases, no percentages provided.

Table 5
 Marijuana Use Among Arrestees in Selected Cities ADAM 2000-2003 (Adult Male Arrestees Only)

Selected ADAM Site	Marijuana Market Indicators					
	THC Positive	30 Day Use	Days w/ \$ Buy	Outdoor \$ Buy	Fail Buy, Police	Fail Buy, Police
National Median All Sites	43.0%	44.6%	*	*	*	*
New Orleans	46.0%	49.7%	11.9	71.5%	30.7%	30.7%
New York (Manhattan only)	41.9%	47.0%	15.7	803%	20.4%	20.4%
Houston	35.6%	34.6%	8.6	20.9%	41.3%	41.3%
Cleveland	48.2%	50.1%	11.7	62.1%	33.6%	33.6%
Other Gulf Coast ADAM Sites						
Atlanta	38.2%	41.5%	10.6	39.1%	41.0%	41.0%
Birmingham	43.5%	41.0%	9.0	38.3%	26.3%	26.3%
Dallas	36.2%	38.6%	9.6	20.3%	40.5%	40.5%
San Antonio	39.1%	36.0%	7.2	20.7%	28.6%	28.6%

Source: Golub computed from a combined ADAM data set.

* National Median data cannot be computed for this variable.