

Violence and the Illicit Drug Market: Before During and After Disasters

Eloise Dunlap,

Abstract

This paper examines violence and underlying contexts and social processes that occurred among drug users/dealers before, during and after major disasters: Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. A Stages paradigm is used to study violence during this time. Daily lives, conduct norms and behavior patterns associated with violence are illustrated. At each stage of the hurricanes, people drew heavily upon what they previously learned about behaving in stressful situations. Study Background: Data for this paper comes from a National Institutes of Health research titled "Stages of Drug Market Disruption and Reformulation in Disaster Cities." Hurricanes Gustav and Ike in September 2008 provided an opportunity to document the impacts of multiple instances of violence stemming from the illicit drug market in Houston, New Orleans, and Galveston.

Methods: From 2006-2013 a large scale ethnographic study was conducted in three major cities: New Orleans, Louisiana, Houston and Galveston, Texas. Staff completed in-depth interviews with 132 focal respondents of drug users and sellers. There were 57 focus groups with 243 focus group participants; 350 drug using/selling respondents completed a survey protocol (CAPI), organized around their experiences during the hurricanes. These provided extensive, information for analysis which was performed using Filemaker Pro.

Results: Accounts given by respondents before, during, and after the hurricanes gave a picture of types of violence that took place with people frantically displaying and modeling behaviors that they had acquired through their interaction patterns over time. Chaos and pandemonium, last minute decisions to leave while the water was rising and attempts to purchase or sell drugs all took place together. This presented people with a

frenzied and disordered situation. Violence was prominent in drug use and sales due mainly to pressures to leave and deciding where to go or where to stay

Eloise Dunlap,

National Development and Research Institutes, Inc, 71 West 23rd street, 4th Floor, New York, USA, dunlap@ndri.org