

Alcohol, poverty and Development Project and findings

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Overview

1. Project details
2. Findings
3. Next steps

The project details

The project

- 2011-2013: Alcohol, poverty and development in the Western Cape – ESRC-DFID
- DFID: Alcohol problems are a direct manifestation of deeper structural inequalities, opportunities and barriers
- The differential distribution of risks and hazards relating to drinking are a direct reflection of developmental issues
- Drinking emerges from and reinforces poverty
- BUT also offers tantalising opportunity to escape from it.

Research questions

1. What are the lived relationships between the alcohol control agenda, poverty and development in SA?
2. How are the lived experiences of drinking understood and taken up in the policy making process?
3. How, why and where do the poor drink and under what conditions do they become “problematic”?

Scales of investigation

- (a) Drinking as the latest inclusion within the Global Health and development remit
- (b) Regional and national legislative and policy debates on alcohol in SA
- (c) The drinking practices of township/informal settlement dwellers in CT.

The governance of alcohol represents not only a public health problem, but also the management of the complex and pervasive *lived* externalities of both development *and* poverty

Methodological approaches

Methods

Series of work packages:

1. Data analysis
2. Stakeholder interviews
3. Case study development
4. Focus groups
5. Spatial analysis of outlets
6. Participant observation on public transport
7. Ethnography at homeless shelter/ locie/ shebeens
8. Media/ legislative discourse analysis
9. Co-working with SLF

Findings

1. Data gaps

- 1998/ 2003 SADHS inadequate to ascertain spatial and social risks.
- While data useful, it does not reflect recent consumption trends and changes
- Need data at smaller geographic scales.
- Would be useful to know far more about relationship between income/ education and alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harms.
- Data for evaluation purposes.

2. Hearsay and speculation

- Stakeholder interviews found gaps in knowledge filled by speculation
- Perception that certain people/ places behave in certain ways
- In turn this produces alcohol framed as a particular problem
- Reinforced by gaps between stakeholders and those most 'at risk'
- How to bridge that gap to avoid reinforcement of stereotyping and ensuring that resources correctly allocated?

3. Control of shebeens v regulation of entire system

- Has formalisation been replaced by eradication?
- To what extent focussing on removing the problem of shebeens rather than the problems that are manifested in shebeens?
- If remove shebeens, what livelihood alternatives will be put into place especially if poverty is a risk factor for hazardous drinking?
- Residents' calls for greater order and control, yet residual tensions with the police that undermine this.

- Disparities in access to licenses in poorer areas (structural and financial) reinforcing existing geographical gap between legitimate and illegitimate retailing.
- Regulation of industry activities and policy influence?
- More important that entire industry upholds expectation of minimum standards?
- Blockages in judicial system – 26 weeks for blood test

4. Health risks

- The role of health within the discourse of alcohol control is limited and often ambiguous.
- Violence, injury and HIV prevention are key public health concerns
- Role of alcohol in chronic disease risk is significant in South Africa, yet rarely part of policy rubric.
- Is violence the language with the greatest political and public currency? What about chronic disease and human development?

5. Demand for information and education

- Focus groups revealed a demand for more and better information on the risks of alcohol as well as the ways young people could avoid/ resist drinking.
- Stakeholder interviews revealed a diminished appetite to fund educational programmes due to 'lack of evidence'
- Education important within broader development remit of empowerment work. Space within the Life Orientation syllabus for example. Teacher training etc.

Next steps

- Compare the South African case with that of Botswana – impact of high taxation and clamp down on shebeens on drinking cultures, attitudes and trends.
- More detailed research on the role of the liquor industry in shaping policy responses at a national level and, especially the creation and mobilisation of evidence.
- What might alternatives to shebeening be? How can recreation and employment opportunities actually be generated and made workable alternatives to drinking?

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