



The ethics of alcohol policy

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The Nuffield Council on Bioethics

- Established in 1991
- Independent body that examines ethical questions raised by advances in biology and medicine
- Contributes to policy making and stimulates debate
- 18 publications e.g. animal research, premature babies, genetic screening, pharmacogenetics



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Public health: ethical issues

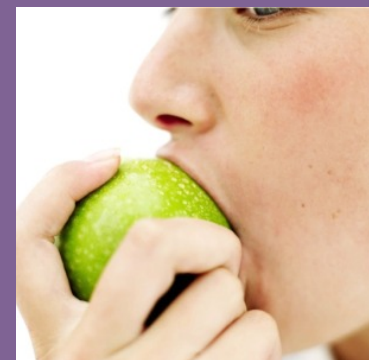
- Report published November 2007
- Ethical and policy framework
- Four case studies:
 - Infectious disease
 - Obesity
 - Alcohol and smoking
 - Fluoridation of water



Whose job is it to ensure that we lead a healthy life?

“The science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organised efforts of society”

- Individuals?
- Government?
- Industry?
- Others?



The report offers an ethical framework



The “nanny state”?

- Individual freedom versus promotion of public health
- JS Mill 1859 “On Liberty”
 - Protect individual autonomy
 - Justifications for state intervention:
 - Prevent harm to others
 - Care of the vulnerable
 - Educate
 - Provide public services



Beyond Mill: further considerations

- Consent
- Inequalities
- Value of community
- Third parties (e.g. companies)

The Stewardship State

Aims to:

- Reduce the risks of ill health people impose on others
- Provide environmental conditions for good health
- Educate and inform
- Protect vulnerable groups
- Provide access to medical services
- Reduce inequalities

Whilst:

- Avoiding coercion
- Minimising intrusion into people's lives
- Ensuring consent



Proportionality

- Justifiable objective
- Appropriate means
- Effectiveness
- Necessity

The intervention ladder

Eliminate choice

Restrict choice

Guide choice by disincentives

Guide choice by incentives

Guide choice by changing the default policy

Enable choice

Provide information

Do nothing



Role of industry

- Various third parties also have a role in public health, e.g. schools, charities, businesses
- Businesses:
 - E.g. food, drink, tobacco and pharmaceutical companies, shops, pubs and restaurants
 - Have responsibilities towards employees and society
 - Corporate social responsibility has a role in public health
 - Where there is lack of corporate responsibility, state intervention is justified



Case study: Alcohol

- Excessive consumption a major contributor to ill health
- Also associated with crime, violence and accidents
- Alcohol related deaths in UK doubled in 15 years
- Worldwide 76.3m people with diagnosed disorders caused by alcohol



Role of Government – Harms

- Harms caused justifies coercive measures to reduce consumption
- Focus should be on measures found to be effective
- E.g. measures on pricing, hours of sale and availability



Role of Government - Children

- Children considered a vulnerable group
- Levels of consumption raise concern
- Public health measures should pay particular attention to the health of children



Role of industry

- Industry should “recognise more fully the vulnerability of children and young people, and take clearer responsibility for preventing harms to health.
- E.g. advertising and sale
- Where industry fails to self-regulate, State justified in intervening



Further questions?

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