

Response to commentary on Editorial “Towards an evidence based alcohol policy”

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Mahesh Rajasuriya proves the very point I was trying to make in my editorial on alcohol: that it is difficult to have a rational discussion on alcohol due to the highly emotive nature of the topic, which is why it is difficult to have a rational alcohol policy in Sri Lanka.

The points he makes such as the need to substantiate every statement in an editorial are pedantic to say the least. That Pakistan has a total ban on alcohol and that it is a country with very high heroin consumption are facts. In fact, the thrust of my argument was that the Pakistani authorities had linked these two realities and attributed the latter to the former. Whether they are causally related or not, need proof. My intention was not to find a causal relationship but to refer to the current discussion taking place in that country.

That Czar Nicholas II attempted to control vodka consumption by banning sales in 1914 and that people ransacked his cellar are well known facts. Whether his fall from power was due to his alcohol policy is historical speculation; in a revolution that had many historical and social roots, the ban on vodka could have played only a minor role.

An invited editorial gives its author the freedom to write what he or she sees fit based on experience and existing research findings. I selected some historical facts and discussions based on such facts to highlight and contextualize the research findings that followed. My main objective was to highlight the very problem of emotive discussions that have replaced scientific findings with regard to alcohol research and policies.

Mahesh Rajasuriya’s response highlights this very problem even more.

As for his dismissal of our findings with regard to a randomised control trial of alcohol education in two villages in Sri Lanka, I am glad to report that our findings at the end of six months were re-confirmed after a further follow up study at 24 months; this research has been submitted for publication. These heavy drinkers in a rural area reduced drinking when they received a simple message using posters and street drama to moderate their drinking to three units or less. Those who did so continued to maintain such moderation even after 24 months. That is how individuals with no professional training responded to a rational message on alcohol.

Declaration of interest

None

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