



School for Public Health Research @ LSHTM (SPHR@L)

SPHR@L Seminar Series: 2013-2014

A talk by **Dr. S Vittal Katikireddi** from The University of Glasgow

Thursday, 20th March 2014, 5:15 pm
Drinks reception to follow

Faculty Meeting Room (G9), LSHTM, 15-17 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SH

Abstract

Minimum unit pricing of alcohol in Scotland: Lessons for evidence-informed policy

Minimum unit pricing of alcohol is a high-profile public health policy which aims to reduce population harms arising from alcohol consumption. In contrast to the more widely used approach of taxation of alcohol, minimum unit pricing seeks to target those at greatest risk of experiencing alcohol harms while also addressing loss-leading practices. This research treats minimum unit pricing policy as a case study to better understand the public health policy process. In particular, the case study will be used to illuminate our understanding of the relationship between evidence and public health policy.

The analysis draws on policy documents, interviews (politicians, civil servants, researchers and policy advocates) and newspaper content to identify factors responsible for developing this innovative legislation.

Public health advocates played a crucial role in bringing about policy change and expended considerable effort in actively trying to reframe the alcohol policy debate, drawing upon epidemiological concepts. Econometric modelling carried out by a team at the University of Sheffield appears particularly influential but research findings were not transferred into policy but rather translated to suit the political context. A 'multiple lenses' approach builds upon these findings and political science theory to provide a broader explanation of the overall policy process and place the roles of evidence on the minimum unit pricing policy process in context.

Drawing on the empirical findings from this case study and other research, a conceptual model for the relationship between evidence and public health policy will be outlined. The model suggests that evidence is likely to be used in different ways, depending on the extent that political values underpinning an issue are contested. Furthermore, it is argued that the use of evidence for rhetorical purposes is a legitimate and helpful means of highlighting the health aspects of public policy issues. Lessons for public health researchers and practitioners, as well as directions for future research and theoretical implications, will be raised.

Dr. S Vittal Katikireddi is a Clinical Lecturer in Public Health at the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow.