

The prevention of fetal alcohol exposure: A road paved with good intentions

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- 32 interviewees – United States, Canada and Australia
- NOFASD Australia
- All the families from whom I have learnt about what it is to live with FASDs



Research questions

1. How has fetal alcohol exposure prevention, as a public policy issue, unfolded in three countries - USA, Canada and Australia?
2. Are there similarities or differences in the three countries and what is the influence of these phenomena on policy?
3. How might this inform prevention policy in Australia 2013?

Limitations

- Working knowledge
- Historical events
- Interviewees
- Themes

Wicked Problems (Rittel and Weber 1976)

- Intractable with no apparent solution
- Applied to multiple problems
- Social implications – require change in attitude and behaviour
- Concept of problem ‘wickedness’ has been criticised

Modelling agenda building

(Cobb, Cobb and Ross 1973)

1. Inside access
2. Mobilization
3. Outside access

Modelling agenda building - phases

1. Initiation
2. Specification
3. Expansion
4. Entrance

Key themes – interview data

SELECTED THEMES		USA	CANADA	AUSTRALIA	
Champions	Grassroots	✓	✓	✓	
	Inside government	✓	✓	✓	
	Collaboration	Informal	✓	✓	✓
		Formal	✓	✓	✓
Discrimination	Cultural	✓	✓	✓	
	Gender	✓	✓	✓	
Love of alcohol		✓	✓	✓	
Diagnosis		✓	✓	✓	
Prevalence-economic cost		✓	✓	✓	

Inside Access Model

Government - national		USA (NIH, SAMHSA, NIAAA)	CANADA (PHAC, CCSA)	AUSTRALIA		
				(Gov't Departments)	(NHMRC/ Universities)	
Institutions	Guide policy	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Funding allocation	✓	✓	✓		
	Policy focus	Culture	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Gender	✓	✓	✓	✓
	High level collaboration	✓	✓		✓	
	Clearinghouse function	✓	✓			
	National Plan		✓	✓		
	Labelling	✓	✓	✓		

Inside Access Model

State/ provincial/ territory governments		USA	CANADA	AUSTRALIA
Policy	Statement /	✓	✓	✓ WA
	Action	✓	✓	
Funding allocation		✓	✓	
Research Focus	Culture	✓	✓	
	Gender	✓	✓	
	Judicial	✓	✓	✓WA/Qld
Support resources				
Collaboration		✓	✓	✓WA
Clearinghouse function		✓	✓	

Outside Access Model

National NGO's		USA (NOFAS)	CANADA (NW Canadian Partnership)	AUSTRALIA (NOFASD Australia)
Policy influence		✓		✓
Target group representation		✓	✓ NATs	✓
Research focus	Culture	✓	✓	✓
	Gender	✓	✓	✓
Collaboration	Informal	✓	✓	✓
	Formal			
Clearinghouse function		✓	✓	✓
Resource availability/accessibility		✓	✓	✓

Outside Access Model

Grassroots organisations		USA	CANADA	AUSTRALIA
Parent initiated		✓	✓	✓
Prevention focus	Individuals/Families	✓	✓	✓
	Culture	✓	✓	✓
	Gender	✓	✓	✓
Collaboration		✓	✓	✓
Resources		✓	✓	✓

Strategies (Roberts, 2007)

1. Authoritative – power concentrated with small number of stakeholders
2. Competitive – power dispersed and contested
3. Collaborative – power dispersed and uncontested

Intractable problems are socially defined

- People see the world differently and construct 'meaning'
- Approach will vary – life preferences, background, education, affiliations
- Derive from “the interdependencies and complexities of living together without a shared set of values
- Conflict over problem definition and solution

Intractable problems are socially defined

1. To gain attention grassroots proponents hand over to experts for definition and solution – specification and expansion – inside and outside government (Rittel and Webber 1976)
2. Values increasingly conflict as expansion strategies engage diverse groups
3. Leads to power disparities – dominance by those with technical expertise/influence inside government
4. Problem is fractured with priority focus to fewer aspects
5. Solution focus shifts to traditional linear approach

Summary – unintended consequences

- Some mothers and some cultural groups framed as special populations ‘at higher risk’ – policy attention
- Paucity of evidence of incidence and prevalence rates in general population
- Broad spectrum ‘invisibility’ perpetuates ‘denial’ of the true scope of the problem
- ‘Special population’ groups are already under greater scrutiny and are easy to access
- High incidence of FAS reported – easier to diagnose and less contentious to label child and parent

Summary – unintended consequences

Concept of ‘othering’ and use of alcohol (a drug) mobilised through:

- Promotion of personal choice and perpetuation of ‘culture’ of responsible drinking
- ‘Problem drinking’ separated from complexities of women’s lived experience
- FAS only and association with high risk drinking
- Income revenue is protected
- Labelling in USA, some provinces in Canada and self-regulation in Australia

Conclusions

1. Proponents need help from those with influence who can influence policy (inside and outside)
2. Values increasingly conflict as expansion strategies engage diverse groups
3. Power disparity – dominance by those with technical expertise
4. Problem fractured managed through attention to ‘aspects’ of the problem
5. Initiation of problem revisited by original proponents or new group emerges in response to unintended consequence

Thank you

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