

CHASE ON THE CASE

Lies, damn lies and statistics!



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I make no apology for returning to the theme that alcohol has become the 'new tobacco'. Barely a day goes by without some worthy member of the 'great and the good' bashing the alcohol industry and blaming it for all the ills of society.

For example, take the report on social exclusion prepared by Ian Duncan-Smith for the Conservative Party. Mr Duncan-Smith declared that alcohol is now cheaper than ever before - and the statistics in his report prove it! Therefore the government would be justified in levying a large increase in alcohol duties to discourage alcohol consumption and reduce what he called the "epidemic of alcoholism in our country".

So, I read his report, which, judging by his comments, was more than he had bothered to do. Here's what it actually said about alcohol prices: Since 1984 alcohol prices have risen by 24% more than the general level of prices. So, in fact alcohol is now more expensive than ever before! However, over the same period wages had increased by 91% more than prices, so, it would be true to say that alcohol was more affordable than 15 years ago - but that is true of virtually everything - but less true of alcohol than most other products!

The fact of the matter is that alcohol is now taxed more than any other product with the exception of petrol. Alcohol-related violent offences have decreased every year since 1995, with the exception of 2003, but despite this people are increasingly likely to think that alcohol-related disorder is a problem (up from 20% in 2003 to 25% in 2006). Both these figures come from the British Crime Survey. So why do people think alcohol problems are getting worse when most of them are getting better? Because politicians and television programmes like 'Booze Britain' distort the truth and give the public 'tabloid truth' rather than educating them about what is really going on.

There are lies, damn lies and statistics - apart from mine of course!

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