

Narkotika och alkohol i den allmänna opinionen

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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to study public opinion on social problems, with focus on the problems of alcohol- and drug abuse. Public opinion is studied through a survey, distributed to a cross-sectional, randomised and representative sample of the Swedish population, aged 18 to 69 years. The survey was distributed in spring 1995 (N=3 000). Apart from background questions, the survey contains questions on how respondents perceive different aspect of alcohol- and drug problems and what should be done about them.

The theoretical perspective treats social problems as the result of collective defitional processes, through which alcohol- and drug problems have been given different cognitive and moral connotations. As a result, the problems have acquired objective facticity. According to this perspective, reality is a social construction and reality and society have a dual character of objective facticity and subjective meaning.

The term "public opinion" is discussed in the thesis. The conclusion drawn is that there is mainly two ways of understanding public opinion. In the first case, public conversation and debate is seen as a prerequisite to public opinion, which is comprehended as a group-based discursive phenomenon. In the second case, public opinion is equated with the results of opinion polls.

The results show that alcohol- and drug problems are perceived as serious social problems, though drug abuse is seen as more serious. Concerning drugs, the public perceptions are, to a large extent, unanimous. Drugs are dependency-generating, dangerous and should be forbidden. The punishment for drug-related crimes should be more severe than today. Large parts of the respondents agree on all of this. Concerning alcohol, the results show greater differences between different groups of respondents. A majority of the women are less positive to alcohol than the men, and more in favour of alcohol restrictions. The same goes for older people compared to younger. One central conclusion concerns the unanimity in the perception of drugs, while the perception of alcohol is much more varied. The low visibility of groups expressing different views on the drug problem in public debate seems to be reflected in the results of the survey. The respondents' perception of drugs is thus very much in line with official discourse.