

# SOCIETY

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Seven out of ten British teenagers are very satisfied with their lives

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Satisfaction is much higher for teenagers living with both natural parents



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# The best days of our lives?

*Sarah Womack, former political and social affairs correspondent of the Daily Telegraph examines how to improve teenage happiness*

**BRITAIN'S CHILDREN ARE** said to be the unhappiest in the West. According to an international league table compiled by the United Nations Children's Fund, they are prone to bad physical and mental health, failure at school, and have the poorest relationships with their parents and friends. The disturbing picture provoked renewed concern about the country's seven million primary and secondary school pupils, and fresh demands for ministers to intervene.

Most state action has so far been aimed at reducing child poverty, a policy predicated on the very natural assumption that if families are richer, the children in them will be happier. The Labour government calculated child poverty by household income but also suggested that 'not being able to afford things that most people consider necessary', like holidays, was a useful measure.

But research from Understanding Society challenges that assumption and suggests that

other issues, such as the quality of sibling relationships, are key if children's sense of well-being is to improve.

Understanding Society is an ESRC-funded research study designed to provide new evidence about British people, their lives, behaviours and beliefs. Following 100,000 people in 40,000 households year by year and asking them questions about a wide spectrum of areas relating to their working and personal lives, it found that seven in ten teenagers in Britain are actually 'very satisfied' with their lives. It detected 'no association between the new poverty measures and life satisfaction,' suggesting that few if any of the items included in Labour's list of what is important to children – holidays, having a bedroom to oneself by the age of ten, friends round regularly for tea – make a real difference to children's lives.

Intriguingly, researcher Gundi Knies from the University of Essex found that teenagers from ethnic minority groups, who are normally thought to be among the poorest sections of society, are happier than their white British counterparts. The study does, however, confirm other, well-established, findings that life satisfaction is much higher for teenagers living with both natural parents.

Understanding Society makes other interesting observations too – that children's happiness is greater when there are fewer other children in the household, and that sibling bullying is rife and causes considerable unhappiness.

Rivalry and occasional conflict between siblings or peers are normal. In contrast, repeated physical or emotional cruelty (bullying) is not. Parents and teachers need to use consistent and fair interventions when bullying occurs so that children can enjoy their lives rather than worry about the next attack.

**The quality of sibling relationships is key to children's sense of well-being**

Many sources of childhood unhappiness, such as commercial pressures on children, too much competition in education, divorced and separated parents, were examined in the wake of the UN report – but not sibling relationships.

Family breakdown was widely agreed to be the cause of considerable childhood angst, with one third of British 16 year olds now living apart from their biological fathers, while school bullying and 'cyber bullying'

were significant triggers for depression. But the Understanding Society study found that sibling bullying was far more prevalent than bullying at school, and while sibling bullying remains high throughout adolescence, school bullying decreases between the ages of 10-15.

The study of siblings and bullying, by Dieter Wolke from the University of Warwick and Alexandra Skew, University of Essex, says: "By middle childhood, children spend as much if not more time interacting with siblings than with parents, and in many families aggression between siblings is frequent and a source of great concern to parents."

The authors cited previous research which found that nearly a third of children (30 per cent) with siblings were frequently bullied by their sibling, with eight per cent scared of being hurt badly by their sibling. Around 40 per cent of children admitted to bullying their brothers or sisters.

Those bullied by siblings were more likely to be involved in bullying at school. However sibling bullying has been 'relatively ignored in the literature perhaps because it is so common,' Wolke and Skew say. Their own findings, based on more than 2,000 10-15-year-olds, showed that most children with siblings were involved in bullying (54 per cent) and mostly became victims and were bullies at other times (33.6 per cent). Those who were involved in sibling bullying reported significantly lower happiness scores.

So if material deprivation is less important than previously thought, and sibling relationships more so, how can the lives of children be made happier? Hungarian American psychologist Csikszentmihályi Mihály says happiness occurs most often when people are engaged in absorbing activities that cause them to forget themselves, lose track of time and stop worrying. 'Flow' is the term he coined to describe this phenomenon. The impact is the same, whether a teenager or a pensioner: a life of many activities in 'flow' is likely to be a life of great satisfaction.

Professor Robert Winston, presenter of the BBC TV series *Child of Our Time* which has followed 25 children from their births in 2000 and subjected them to rigorous examination, says there is no magic formula. "But good health and exercise help, as does being able to entertain yourself," he says.

"If you give children self-esteem by rewarding them for their efforts and giving them a sure knowledge that you are there for them, then they will tend towards happiness. Teach them to behave well towards others, give appropriate rectitude, and above all show them genuine love – then you encourage feelings of what we call happiness." ■

[www.understandingsociety.org.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.org.uk)

# On the move

*Despite the upheaval, we are a nation of keen movers, but are relocations always for the better?*



**Do Britons move for subjective or objective reasons?**

**MOVING HOUSE IS** a huge upheaval, yet the decision to do so is based more on people's perceptions of a neighbourhood than the reality. Married couples are also more likely to move if a woman dislikes a neighbourhood than if her husband does.

Dr Mark Taylor and Dr Birgitta Rabe, of the Institute for Social and Economic Research, examined data from more than 4,000 households across Britain and found a big difference between the sexes when it came to decisions on whether to relocate.

Dr Taylor said: "Life-course events such as having a baby, losing a job or splitting up are often associated with moving house. But not much is known about the effect

that these have on whether people move to a 'better' or 'worse' neighbourhood. Yet neighbourhood characteristics influence important outcomes such as life satisfaction, health and employment."

Using information from the British Household Panel Survey, researchers looked at whether people moved for subjective reasons – liking or not liking the neighbourhood, for example – or used objective criteria such as crime rates. Living in a neighbourhood that a wife likes reduces the relative odds of a move by 89 per cent compared with 46 per cent for a husband.

**Life-course events such as having a baby, losing a job or splitting up are often associated with moving house**

Perceptions also had a greater influence on the decision to move than reality.

Single people were more influenced by subjective rather than objective measures. Liking the neighbourhood reduced the relative odds of moving by about 60 per cent compared to not liking the neighbourhood.

Among the objective measures of neighbourhood deprivation, crime and the quality of the local environment both within and beyond the home were most important. Ceasing to live with parents or having a child leave home were associated with single people moving to more deprived neighbourhoods.

Birgitta Rabe said: "Most employment-related events have no effect on the quality of the neighbourhood that the couples move to. The only such event that seriously affects couples is a husband becoming unemployed. This leads to moves into more deprived areas and is likely to have repercussions for the whole family."

The research findings are published in *Residential mobility, neighbourhood quality and life-course events*. ■

[www.iser.essex.ac.uk/publications/journal/1969](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/publications/journal/1969)

# The Big Society in practice

*The challenges of increasing volunteering, charitable giving and civic participation*

**THE COALITION GOVERNMENT** is a strong advocate of the Big Society in which communities devise their own solutions to social problems. But this raises questions about the capacities of voluntary organisations to step up to the plate, and whether there is a willingness among the population to become more involved in volunteering. Research by the ESRC-funded Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) gives insight into both these questions.

Firstly, rates of volunteering have been very stable for many years. Between 26-29 per cent of the population provide unpaid help to organisations on at least a monthly basis with 40-45 per cent of the population doing so less frequently but at least once a year. Similar findings are evident from the British Household Panel Survey, the advantage of which is that it is tracking the same individuals over time: it records a consistent figure of around 20 per cent, which is lower than other surveys, because the question is a very general one about volunteering.

Much of the work is done by a small subset of the population. The TSRC looked at the idea of a 'civic core' – that section of the population that carries out the majority of volunteering, charitable giving and civic participation. The Citizenship Survey provides data on the amount of money given to charity, the hours of unpaid help given to organisations, and the numbers of civic associations of which individuals are members. People were defined as a member of the core if they provided at least two thirds of hours or money donated to these activities.

Some 75 per cent of the population provide half of voluntary effort and 41 per cent of charitable giving; 30 per cent of the population account for 87 per cent of unpaid help, 79 per cent of charitable giving, and 72 per cent of civic engagement; and one per cent of the population are in the 'core' on all three groups, providing between eight and ten per cent of total effort.

Women, those with higher education qualifications and the middle-aged and young retirees are much more likely than their counterparts in other social groups to be members of the core. Nearly 60 per cent of females with higher education qualifications and aged 50-64 were regarded as members of the 'core' on these figures. This is a highly engaged group, but only accounts for around five per cent of the population of working age.

Crucially, these groups tend to be overrepresented in the most prosperous parts of the country.



**Do voluntary organisations have the capacity to help build the Big Society?**

What about the capacities of voluntary organisations? The regional and local distribution of registered charities and other third sector organisations shows a complex mosaic. This is sometimes characterised in terms of a contrast between 'charity deserts' in some parts of the country, principally the former industrial regions of the North of England, and 'hotspots' in prosperous rural areas of the south-east.

**It is not clear whether it will be possible to achieve substantial change in the numbers of volunteers**

The fact that there are few charities registered in an area does not mean that there is not a substantial charitable presence there: numerous large national charities operate branch structures or run projects in various parts of the country that are not picked up in a mapping of charity offices.

Of course, third-sector organisations do not all rely solely on charitable resources to fund

their activities: many are reliant on grants and contracts from the public sector. Analysis by TSRC of the 2008 National Survey of Third Sector Organisations shows that income from grants and contracts (which by and large means the public sector) was the most important source of income for over one quarter of organisations dealing with important social challenges such as addiction, homelessness, offenders and ex-offenders, victims of crime, and people with learning difficulties; for those dealing with people with mental health needs and with a

broad category of socially excluded/vulnerable people the proportion was one third or more.

At a time of substantial reductions in public expenditure, careful thought will be necessary to avoid cuts to the budgets of organisations working with marginalised groups, since these are not generally organisations that attract traditional sources of charitable funding in large volumes, unlike some other charitable causes.

There are, therefore, challenges ahead. It is not clear whether it will be possible to achieve substantial change in the numbers of volunteers or in their social and geographical distribution. Paradoxically, it is likely to require investment in the infrastructure needed to recruit and retain volunteers, as well as in supporting organisations which provide vital services yet which are more reliant on the public sector than traditional philanthropic sources of income. Without this, the capacities and resources available to communities through voluntary effort will vary considerably and this is likely to mean that it is the most prosperous communities that benefit most from the Big Society. ■

[www.tsrc.ac.uk](http://www.tsrc.ac.uk)

**John Mohan**

*Professor of Social Policy, the University of Southampton and Deputy Director, TSRC*

Even during the global recession the Haiti earthquake appeal raised £94 million



# Generous people and the altruism gene

*The motivation behind charitable giving is explored as the government seeks to build the Big Society*

**TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES** and global wealth disparities have prompted fresh interest in how charitable giving can help meet needs. From a few pence for a beggar on the street to the founding of major institutes such as Guys' and St Thomas' Hospital, or the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery, people have always given to good causes.

The coalition government's appeal for a Big Society is relying on such instincts, emphasising that 'we are all in this together,' while Gordon Brown previously called for a new 'democracy of giving... where all those who can, help all those who can't.' That the British public is willing to give can be seen in the £15.5 billion donated through gifts, legacies, endowments and corporate giving every year.

Its capacity for immediate response to need is witnessed in the £94 million raised in just a few months for the Haiti earthquake appeal, and in the acceleration of giving for the Pakistan floods once the dire effects became clear. But does

this mean it can be motivated to give even more? Why do we give?

The ESRC-funded research Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy examines how and why people give. It finds that motivation is often regarded as a kind of simple 'magic bullet' that triggers a gift, in the belief that if someone is asked in the right way, in the right place, at the right time,

they will make a gift – or refuse if they are not. Research shows the power of an effective 'ask'.

For example, people give more where a powerful image of need is projected, or a clear idea of the difference their gift will make is provided. An emphasis on how a gift can relieve the donor's anxiety or concern is also effective, as is building on the personal links between the donor and the cause.

Evoking a belief in the fairness or 'deservingness' of the beneficiary can be powerful, as illustrated by the donor who said: "If I see someone begging on the street,

I think there but for the grace of God go I – one never knows when you might need a friendly hand."

But the decision to make a gift is not only a response to a charity's messages. It also results from more fundamental attitudes, behaviour and values, and explanations have been explored from different perspectives. Scientists, for example, are looking for a possible altruism gene. Economists are interested in consumer motivation; what we can buy for our donation and its value for money in terms of services or enjoyable warm-glow feelings derived from giving. This implies that the wealthy have more opportunities to act charitably, support their preferred causes, often arts and education, and gain rewards like social recognition.

For religious people, charitable giving is an expression of faith, values and beliefs, whether Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu or Buddhist. It is a duty, and research shows a strong positive link between high levels of faith and of giving. Psychologists are also interested in whether people who give help in other ways such as caring for elderly neighbours, or donating blood. Speaking about his own charitable foundation, Microsoft founder Bill Gates has highlighted that for him "...with great wealth comes great responsibility to give back to society." Motivation to give is deeply embedded in people's economic, social, family and spiritual lives: persuading people to give more needs to begin there. ■

[www.cgap.org.uk](http://www.cgap.org.uk)

**People give more where a powerful image of need is projected, or a clear idea of the difference their gift will make**



**Problem drinkers have difficulty focusing on goals that would provide an alternative pastime**

## Battle of the bottle

*The latest developments in the fight to redeem 'booze Britain'*

**TACKLING PROBLEM DRINKING** is an imperative, but what are the best methods?

Researchers say excessive alcohol consumption is often driven by problem drinkers having an 'automatic attention' to alcohol; they unwittingly pay attention to alcohol-related information in their

environment, and they then drink too much. They also have problems with motivation; they have difficulty focusing on goals that would provide them with a healthy alternative.

ESRC-funded researchers at Bangor University, looking to tackle excessive drinking in society, developed computerised training called the Alcohol Attention Control Training Programme (AACTP). Alongside this, they developed a counselling procedure called the Life Enhancement and Advancement Programme (LEAP), whose main goal is to help excessive drinkers understand how they use alcohol to regulate their mood. The aim was to help drinkers achieve their goals and lead a more satisfying life.

Four groups of excessive drinkers participated in the research. One group received only AACTP. A second group received LEAP. The

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## Faith-based schools in a secular culture

*Do religious schools still have a place in our society? The diversification of Britain would suggest yes*

**WHAT IS THE** place of faith-based education in Britain? Research by Professor James Conroy, one of the contributors to the Arts and Humanities Research Council and ESRC Religion and Society Programme finds there is an increasingly coherent and well-organised campaign against the continued state funding of religiously denominational schools. The issue came to the fore in the general election, and the run-up to the state visit of Pope Benedict XVI. Critics of faith-based schooling argue that such institutions 'disfigure' Britain through the perpetuation of prejudice, and ethnic and religious division, and that Britain is a secular place. They say that separate schooling actively or passively promotes intolerance and that it tramples on the rights of children to self-determination.

Any examination of surveys of opinion and attachment across the last 30 years will demonstrate that Britain, along with most of Europe, has witnessed a decline in the numbers of those formally attached to religious organisations. But more significantly many sociologists, psychologists and educationalists would challenge the claim that Britain is irreligious.

Most Britons remain attached to religious and spiritual belief. It is true that these beliefs

are less settled than in the past but it is wrong to suggest that they are non-existent. The continuing desire of the woman on the 'Clapham Omnibus' to send her offspring to a faith-based school has grown, not diminished.

She may want to secure better exam results for her children. It would be foolish to deny that many parents send their children to such schools given the widespread perception that they are academically more successful than their local counterparts and it would also be foolish to deny that some schools trade on this widespread perception.

**Many sociologists, psychologists and educationalists would challenge the claim that Britain is irreligious**

But it is equally important to recognise that many parents send their children to faith-based schools out of a broader sense that they provide a more rounded education than that available in a neighbourhood school. While they themselves may not be regular attendees at church, synagogue, temple or mosque, they nevertheless wish to see their offspring familiarised with these cultural and religious roots.

Moreover, parents often want to see certain kinds of social and cultural entailments highlighted in ways not so readily available in non-faith schools. Of course the claim to offer a more rounded education is tendentious



given that 'more rounded' might cover everything from academic achievement to moral righteousness and it is inappropriate to imagine that such practices can't or don't take place in other kinds of schools.

So, what are the justifications for continuing to support faith schools in a multi-cultural Britain? If Britain is multi-cultural, then it arguably may become more, not less, reasonable to support such schools, most especially given the right, enshrined in the UN convention, that parents should be able to determine the kind of education that their children receive.

It could be argued that faith schools actually contribute to social advancement

third group received both AACTP and LEAP and the fourth was a control group, receiving neither. Results were recorded immediately after the training, and again three and six months later. Overall the research showed that weekly alcohol consumption significantly decreased, alcohol-related problems significantly decreased, dependence on alcohol significantly decreased, confidence to resist drinking in high-risk situations significantly increased, and motivation to reduce drinking significantly increased over the period.

The effects of AACTP tended to occur more quickly than LEAP, but the effects of LEAP tended to last longer. There were few added benefits when AACTP and LEAP were given together. ■

[www.bangor.ac.uk](http://www.bangor.ac.uk)



**Many parents send their children to faith-based schools for academic reasons**

through a more conscious and deliberate emphasis on citizenship. Indeed the most substantial study of the last 20 years in this area would suggest that faith schools add significant social capital to the community. Some might also wish to argue that it is not self-evidently the job of schools to ameliorate a range of social problems and that matters of social disharmony lie much further upstream than schooling. ■

[www.religionandsociety.org.uk](http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk)



The government has called on citizens to intervene if they see trouble on the streets

## Turning a blind eye

*Can the nation shake off its 'walk-on-by' attitude and actually stop to help?*

**WHAT WOULD HAPPEN** if a crowd of innocent bystanders saw a drunken youth picking on an elderly man?

Jack Straw, the former Labour home secretary, described Britain in 1999 as a 'walk-on-by' society. He lamented the failure of people to recognise their responsibility to intervene in emergencies. Both Prime Minister David Cameron and the current Home Secretary Dominic Grieve have made speeches on the rise of the 'walk-on-by' society, and the willingness of others to intervene lies at the heart of the Big Society.

In speaking out, politicians are tapping into an anxiety that has a long history. The rise of the modern city in the late 19th century, and the resultant society of strangers, led to worries about the breakdown of bonds of responsibility between citizens. There is much psychological research that seems to show that the presence of others – particularly strangers – can make people less likely to help. This phenomenon is known as the bystander effect – the idea that the presence of others in an emergency can lead to diffusion of responsibility or audience inhibition.

Recent ESRC-funded work by Dr Mark Levine of Lancaster University has begun to challenge some of the assumptions of the bystander effect. Rather than seeing the presence of others as the problem, it has tried to explore the conditions under which the power of the group can promote intervention, by looking at violent incidents captured on CCTV from around Britain.

**Violence tends to happen when groups of bystanders fail to control violent perpetrators**

The research examines one of the key concerns facing contemporary Britain – anxiety about the rise of violence and anti-social behaviour at night. Politicians and the public complain that excessive alcohol consumption and the presence of young people has led to an epidemic of violent public behaviour. So researchers conducted a systematic behavioural analysis of 42

aggressive incidents captured on CCTV, some of which ended in violence, some of which did not. Analysis revealed that, contrary to popular belief, third parties were very likely to intervene in aggressive incidents. More important, they were far more likely to intervene to calm or control violence than they were to escalate it. This increased as the group size of the bystanders increased. Moreover, attempts to stop violence from breaking out were most likely to be successful when a number of bystanders acted together – rather than when one bystander attempted to defuse the situation on their own.

Such findings turn the conventional wisdom about the problems of anti-social behaviour and violence on its head. Violence tends to happen when groups of bystanders fail to control violent perpetrators, rather than as the result of an unwillingness to intervene. To create practical intervention strategies to stop violence, more needs to be learnt about how groups try to control anti-social behaviour, and what makes them successful, rather than why people fail to intervene. ■

[www.psych.lancs.ac.uk](http://www.psych.lancs.ac.uk)

Many experts believe that the drug problem should be handled by the health system rather than by criminalisation

# The future of drug regulation

*Martin Ince talks to Professor David Nutt about drug classification, legal highs and the possibility of 'safe' drugs*

**BRITAIN'S FORMER TOP** drugs expert has a lengthy job title: David Nutt, Edmond J Safra Professor of Neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College, London.

But it is for his role in public policy, not as a scientist, that Professor Nutt is best-known. Observers regard his high-profile departure in 2009 from the chairman's role at the Home Office's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs as a definitive example of misunderstanding between politicians and scientists. It followed his outspoken comments on cannabis and ecstasy – he had criticised the decision to reclassify cannabis to Class B from C and said the process had become politicised.

But as he explains a year later, Professor Nutt is only interested in reducing the harm that drugs do to society.

Like most professionals in the field, he is sure that drug problems are better dealt with by the health system than by criminalising their users. But he is not an advocate of decriminalising drug use.

He told *Britain in 2011* that he has re-examined the range of harms done by a wide range of drugs. While crack cocaine, heroin, crystal meth and alcohol are most harmful to their users – and in that order – alcohol, crack, heroin and tobacco do the most damage to society as a whole.

Professor Nutt says that it makes no sense for drugs less harmful than alcohol to be illegal. Indeed, he sees it as “unjust and counterproductive”. His solution is regulated access to these less damaging drugs, which might also reduce the damage done by alcohol itself. But he does not support easier access to crack or to heroin, and is also cautious about crystal meth and cocaine.

Professor Nutt is convinced that the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act, which governs drug control in Britain, needs replacing. “It is scientifically wrong,” he says, “and is not able to adapt to the internet age.” A new Royal Commission may well be needed to consider alternatives.

As proof, he points to recent alarm over ‘legal highs’ such as mephedrone. Many of these drugs, he says, are made by the same firms in China that make legal pharmaceutical ‘precursor’ chemicals. They are shipped to Britain in batches of up to 100kg and sold in ‘head shops’, online or physical, under some flimsy disguise as bath salts or plant food.

As Professor Nutt sees it, “the web has opened the market for every chemist in the world” to design and order these drugs. Mephedrone, he says, “became popular in 2009, saw its use rise steeply after the *Daily Mail* raised the alarm later that year, and was banned in February 2010, with no evidence of its having harmed anyone.”

These drugs are popular, he says, because head shops provide some quality control and bad side-effects are rare. By contrast, illegally-traded drugs such as ecstasy are often impure and sometimes contain no trace of the drug at all. Legal highs “provide a few hours of feeling good for £10.” And most important of all, the users are not risking a career-limiting criminal record. One key user group, says Professor Nutt, is soldiers. The arrival of mephedrone is believed to explain the halving in positive tests for cocaine among members of the British Army last year.

Professor Nutt thinks that far from suppressing this drug innovation, society might get more ambitious about the problem. It might even be possible, at least in principle, to produce ‘harmless heroin’, which would give the user the high without the sometimes fatal effect on their breathing.

**Alcohol, crack, heroin and tobacco do the most damage to society as a whole**

Professor Nutt is in touch with the drinks industry about what he terms “synthetic alcohol”, and insists that its production may be possible: “It would be pleasurable like alcohol is, and it would taste the same. But it would not wreck your liver, it would not be addictive, and it would be reversible. The antidote would always be available, and you could drive home half an hour after taking it.”

One reason why the drinks industry might embrace the idea is the future it faces if it does not. The ban on smoking in public buildings was driven in part by employers’ fear of being sued by the victims of passive smoking. At some point, people whose relatives are killed in road accidents, or attacked on the street by drunks, might also consider legal action against alcohol manufacturers. So might people who cannot visit their town centre at night for fear of drunken crowds.

The problem, says Professor Nutt, is that while alcohol is a traditional part of British culture, it is now being used in new ways. Alongside its long-established role as a social lubricant, it is now used in large volumes by people wanting to get seriously drunk, in ways that injure both body and mind.

If synthetic alcohol does not take off, he regards it as obvious that other forms of alcohol control will have to be strengthened. “The industry is happy to join in responsible drinking campaigns,” he says “because they know that alcohol destroys judgement, so there is little chance they will work.” Minimum pricing would have more success, and might help offset the cost of alcohol in terms of policing and health budgets. ■

[www1.imperial.ac.uk/medicine/people/d.nutt](http://www1.imperial.ac.uk/medicine/people/d.nutt)



David Nutt believes it makes no sense for drugs less dangerous than alcohol to be illegal

## What is social enterprise?

*As the profile of social enterprise rises, the need to understand this sector is ever more pressing*

**THE ROLE OF** social enterprise in delivering public services is gaining increasing attention, but what is meant by social enterprise – an enterprising voluntary sector or a socially aware business sector?

One-in-ten voluntary and non-profit organisations see themselves as social enterprises, and one-in-20 small businesses. These range from large not-for-profit organisations such as the Eden Project in Cornwall to local community organisations such as nurseries.

Social enterprises are defined as organisations that have social aims and trade at their heart. Surveys often have to identify social enterprises, and include those earning more than 50 per cent of their income from trading, and with more than 50 per cent of any surplus put into social causes or their organisation. A wide range of policy documents state that there are at least 62,000 social enterprises.

Analysis by the ESRC-funded Third Sector Research Centre shows that 89 per cent

of the stated social enterprises are private sector organisations rather than Third Sector organisations. Its research on Third Sector organisations suggests that there are at least 16,000 social enterprises in

**What is meant by social enterprise – an enterprising voluntary sector or a socially aware business sector?**

not-for-profit legal forms and 224,000 private social businesses (or 62,000 private social businesses when excluding self-employed people).

However, calculating the scale of social enterprises is not without its tensions. First, there are challenges in defining a social aim. Second, surveys have in the past relied on organisations self-reporting whether they meet the criteria. Third, there are many organisations that may be under the 50 per cent trading income threshold but still consider social enterprises as part of their work.

By understanding the scale of the sector, TSRC offers policymakers a stronger evidence base on which to make decisions. ■

[www.tsrc.ac.uk](http://www.tsrc.ac.uk)

**Cornwall's Eden Project is classed as a social enterprise**



Three quarters of South Wales' 7,000 grass fires are started deliberately



Alamy

# Social marketing puts fires out

*After £7 million of damage, a local fire service turns to a social scientist to help curb anti-social behaviour*

**GRASS FIRES ARE** commonly associated with California or Australia. But in Britain, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service fights an average of 7,000 grass fires a year in the valleys at a cost of £7 million. Three quarters are started deliberately, particularly during the Easter school holidays.

So the Fire Service turned to the research expertise of a social scientist at the ESRC's Centre for Business Relationships, Accountability, Sustainability and Society to help change youngsters' behaviour. Dr Sue Peattie is an expert in social marketing, applying the research and persuasive techniques used more in the commercial world to help meet social goals.

**Fire-setters were predominantly young men motivated by thrill-seeking, attention-seeking and peer pressure**

Dr Peattie said: "The approach went beyond raising awareness about the dangers of setting grass fires. It involved stepping into the shoes of the target audience, and deciding what would incentivise a change in behaviour."

A pilot project was established in Tonypanydy. Another community, Aberdare, acted as a 'control group'. Interviews with youngsters and adults revealed that the fire-setters were predominantly young men motivated by thrill-seeking, attention-seeking, peer pressure, and experimentation. They included an unexpectedly wide range of young people.

The campaign provided education, better law enforcement and activities that gave

youngsters a sense that they 'owned' their environment.

A Youth Advisory Board of teens from Tonypanydy Community College was also set up. They devised the campaign mascot – Bernie the Sheep – and slogan, 'Grass is Green, Fire is Mean', and worked with the Fire Service to plan a range of activities to keep them busy, including bush-craft skills, abseiling, film-making and graffiti workshops. The Bernie website and Facebook page kept the youngsters informed and involved, and participation was rewarded with a Bernie Hoodie and a signed 'pledge' certificate.

The target was to reduce deliberate grass fires around Tonypanydy by 15 per cent. Figures for the Easter period 2010 showed that fires over the two-week holiday, when the Bernie activities were running, were 31 per cent lower than expected, compared to previous years and the figures for Aberdare. Including the fortnight before and after the holiday, fires were down by 74 per cent.

Chief Fire Officer Andy Marles said: "This social marketing project is an innovative approach to addressing a major social problem." The same approach could help to save lives and money in tinderbox regions throughout the world. ■

[www.brass.cf.ac.uk/projects/keywords/behaviour-change](http://www.brass.cf.ac.uk/projects/keywords/behaviour-change)  
[www.bernie.uk.com](http://www.bernie.uk.com)

# Living longer still seen as a problem

*With life expectancy on the rise, how will our culture accommodate this older generation?*

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**IT IS ONE** of the most profound transformations that human society has ever witnessed; life expectancy over the last century rose by two years in each decade, or one week in every five. Almost unnoticed in Britain, the symbolic crossover between the numbers of people over the state pension ages of 60 and 65 and those under 16 happened in 2007. This was the inevitable consequence of the twin drivers of population ageing: increased longevity and declining fertility. Like the rise in life expectancy the decline in fertility is a long-term one which started in the 18th century.

Today the most remarkable aspect of this momentous socio-demographic shift is the rapid rise in the numbers of very elderly people. The numbers of people aged 85 and over have doubled in the past 25 years, to 1.4 million, and will increase more than twofold in the next 25. The fastest expanding of any age group is centenarians: there were barely 100 a century ago and there are 10,000 now.

So what does population ageing mean for society? It is common to see in the press highly simplistic projections of future public spending on long-term care for mainly frail older people. But these figures merely extrapolate current needs to a larger future population instead of asking what would be the impact of a strategy to improve health and well-being before people reach late old age? The evidence on this front is that there is substantial scope for such action. In particular it would go with the grain of the increases in healthy life expectancy, or disability-free life expectancy, that parallel the extension of life.

Unfortunately, however, the pace of the rise in disability-free life expectancy is not keeping up with that of life expectancy itself, unlike some other countries, and urgent action is needed to rectify this anomaly. If the prevention of ill-health and disability in later life is not made a national priority there is a risk that the opportunity of a healthy old age will be denied to increasing numbers and that the gap in life expectancy between rich and poor will grow.

At present those who live in the poorest areas in England die seven years earlier than people in the richest ones and the average difference in disability-free life expectancy is 17 years. These are not genetically caused differences but primarily socio-economic ones which can be addressed by policy interventions. Population ageing also means workforce ageing: employers have fewer younger people to choose from and more older ones. Thus, in the absence of mass immigration, future productivity will depend on how well employers can sustain and use the skills of an ageing workforce.



The rising age of the British population is having a big impact on the welfare state

Despite campaigns to change attitudes towards older workers, over many years, the evidence is still of widespread age discrimination. Such ageism is paradoxical in the context of an ageing workforce and will need to be eliminated if longer working lives are to be realised as well as for reasons of fairness. There is no doubt that the workforce of the future will be an older one, but the challenge of adjusting to this change has yet to be faced.

Ageing is having a big impact on the welfare state and will to do so for the foreseeable future. An overarching question concerns funding: will the social contract between the generations survive

population ageing? There has been a lot of heat generated around this question recently but very little light.

Two things are clear. First, the extent of solidarity between young and old remains strong despite attempts to undermine it: a big majority favour increased spending on pensions and social care.

Second, a new approach is required

to support and sustain this solidarity. It should become an explicit policy priority and generational impact assessments carried out to ensure that the future welfare state continues the past trend of generational equity.

Population ageing is having a major impact on the family and will continue to do so, with fewer adult children providing support to their frail parents, sometimes over long distances. Although the trend has been towards single-person households, after the recession we may see a rise in multi-generation occupancy as younger people find it harder to access the housing market.

In terms of consumer goods, an ageing population should open up vast new markets for products specifically geared to the needs of this age group. There is huge potential here for products that support independence – smart housing and walking aids for example – and that create wealth and employment.

Biotechnology is advancing rapidly and more anti-ageing interventions are becoming available year-on-year. Again there is major social and market potential but also ethical questions concerning who gets access to them. Too often the ageing of the population is regarded as a problem rather than a triumph of economic and social progress. The evidence base that research is producing – notably through the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme funded by five Research Councils, including the ESRC – will enable us to adjust successfully to this quiet revolution providing, that is, it is taken up and applied. What ageing means for society will depend on the responsiveness of policy, practice and product development. ■

[www.newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk](http://www.newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk)



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