



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Stop blaming the industry and follow the science

It's time we learnt to bazooka responsibly

Citation for published version:

Maani, N 2023, 'Stop blaming the industry and follow the science: It's time we learnt to bazooka responsibly', *Health Promotion International*, vol. 38, no. 6. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daad179>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1093/heapro/daad179](https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daad179)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Health Promotion International

Publisher Rights Statement:

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced version of an article accepted for publication in Health Promotion International following peer review. The version of record Nason Maani, Stop blaming the industry and follow the science: it's time we learnt to bazooka responsibly, Health Promotion International, Volume 38, Issue 6, December 2023, daad179, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daad179> is available online at: <https://academic.oup.com/heapro/article/38/6/daad179/7486197>.

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Editor's note:

While we are always conscious of the extent and magnitude of the challenges we face, in common with other journals, as the year ends, we can also provide scope for a lighter touch. In his article exhorting us to "Stop blaming the industry and follow the science" Nason Maani uses humour to show up the arguments all too many harmful industries use in defence of their activities. During 2024, Health Promotion International we will put out a special call for the best end-of-year article that uses humour to promote health promotion objectives.

Title: Stop blaming the industry and follow the science: it's time we learnt to bazooka responsibly

Author: Nason Maani¹

1. Global Health Policy Unit, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, 15a George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LD

There has been an increasingly worrying amount of irresponsible and ill-informed anti-bazooka industry commentary from among many in the "public health" and "medical" communities. The author is choosing to set the record straight by engaging in good faith. In this article, which will take an independent view based only on the evidence, the author seeks to dispel some of the biases and pseudoscientific approaches of Big Public Health in its ideological anti-bazooka crusade.

At core, there has been too much negative focus on and regulation of bazookas, when most harms are associated with a core of irresponsible bazooka users who engage in problem bazookaing. Failure to appreciate this serves no-one, and those who are ideologically biased against bazookas are stalling progress, when they should be partnering with industry to find solutions. Any similarities to other so-called "commercial determinants of health" are purely coincidental as problem bazookaing is a very distinct, nuanced, and unique problem.

The pernicious issue of problem bazookaing

Bazookas are a product mankind has been using and enjoying for many decades, and they have played an important part in history. Responsible bazookaing, by those who choose to bazooka, is a healthy pastime, associated with increased grip-strength, which in turn, is linked to longer life expectancy. Of course, bazooka use has been linked to some harms, like explosive deaths, but almost everything has been linked to these, like traffic accidents, the weather, and socio-economic status. These are complex and not due to any single factor. There is no magic bullet solution to the problem of bazooka-related harms.

The WHO so called “best buy” policies are a classic example of flawed, one-size-fits-all approaches, all about restricting availability, price, or marketing, as if somehow the manufacture and sale of more bazookas and explosives is the problem, when really it is so much more complex. A free-market think tank that is among the world leaders in donor privacy launched an independent report debunking best-buy bazooka policies as ineffective, typical of the nanny state, and a slippery slope to totalitarianism. They argue that bazooka manufacturing represents a source of economic growth and jobs, and a huge potential source of exports, not to mention tax revenue. What is more, they make the case that sudden, explosive deaths among bazooka users actually save the taxpayer money in the long term in health and social care costs, which they helpfully describe as “early death savings”. So, really, the “best buys” are flawed, self-harming and economically illiterate.

Instead, we need to understand that most harms are associated with a core of irresponsible bazooka users, who engage in problem bazookaing. In other words, it is about the user, not the product. The industry has been actively funding research into how problem bazookaing arises, including culture, parental influence, genetics, and psychology. Solutions need to be tailored and proportionate, acknowledging the benefits of responsible bazookaing, focusing on irresponsible individuals, and involving partnership with all stakeholders, including the industry. A key element of this is following the science.

Following the science (whoever funds it)

It just so happens that much of the research on problem bazookaing has been funded by the Foundation for Responsible Bazookaing, an independent grant giving body funded by the largest bazooka manufacturers. To follow the science, we need to start by understanding that it *doesn't matter who funds the science*. The pernicious issue of problem bazookaing is far too important and complex for that sort of second-guessing, and whoever does raise such questions has clear ideological biases

that are distracting from the core problem of irresponsible bazooka use. The public needs good scientists to enter the fray, bazooka industry links or not.

Despite this, there is a worrying trend where bazooka industry funded scientists are being excluded from policy debates on bazooka-related harm. There is no evidence to suggest this funding biases them, and any such insinuation is totally unhelpful and stigmatizing. In reality, as long as funding links are disclosed at the end of papers, then any biasing effects on the research questions, aims, methods, reporting, or subsequent strategic use by commercial actors, cease to exist. Remember that bazooka industry funding often goes to their department or research centre anyway, rather than to the individual researchers within it, so really, they are still independent. In fact, sometimes they feel so independent, they might even forget to disclose funding links.

After all, if we won't accept industry funding for research, how will we answer important questions like "does bazookaing make you more attractive?" or "which responsible bazookaing messages are memorable?" or "what is the role of parents in bazooka behaviours?" Since problem bazookaing is about individuals, rather than products, we need to think about these sorts of questions and really dig into what it is about these individuals that is flawed. Recently a biobank genetic meta-analysis has found that certain genes are linked to both problem bazookaing, and being affected by bazooka-based harm. So, clearly, it's complicated, and genetics play a key role. Problem bazookaing researchers spend long hours considering these issues, citing each other to the point of exhaustion, when they aren't being distracted by unhelpful ad hominem attacks about who funds them.

The important role of industry-funded charities

Aside from dealing with problem bazookaing, we need to also encourage responsible bazooka use, and again, the industry has been pivotal in this. For many years, the industry has been funding BazookAware, an independent charity that seeks to promote responsible bazookaing, through expertly designed campaigns like "when the FUN stops, stop firing" or "How to Bazooka Properly". Thankfully, some governments are now casting aside prejudices and partnering with the industry on these initiatives. These campaigns are robustly evaluated, with questions like "do you think we did something good just then?" or "can you remember what we just told you?" Message retention is statistically significant, meaning this works.

What does not work is advertising restrictions on bazookas. Advertising simply does not increase consumption or harms: there is absolutely no evidence of that. Bazooka companies use advertising for

informing customers, including on lower risk alternatives, and competing on market share. Bazooka advertising is, at core, a hugely expensive yet misunderstood public service. What's more, bazooka marketing restrictions are depriving customers of the tiny BazookAware logos in advertisements, which are, as described above, highly effective. To reiterate, advertising itself does not increase harm, but tiny BazookAware logos on advertising are an important part of reducing harm. Let's not lose sight of that in the blind rush to regulate.

Low-risk alternatives and harm reduction

Part of the reason that much of this "public health" anti-industry hysteria is so harmful, especially when it comes to advertising, is that responsible adults who chose to bazooka are then unable to find out about the many less harmful products the industry has been working on. Many people enjoy bazookas, and we need to meet people where they are. There has been a growth in the availability of low or no explosive bazooka rounds as a meaningful harm reduction approach. While there are still some harms associated with firing a large diameter projectile from a bazooka, it is important to remember just how harmful *full explosive* bazooka rounds can be, so really these are way less harmful, perhaps 95% less harmful. It is critical therefore, that we make low or no explosive bazooka rounds as cheap, appealing, available, and easy to market, as possible.

Some frankly irresponsible commentary has suggested that some cheap, single use, colourful bazookas are somehow attractive to children, and might normalize bazooka use among a new generation. These products are clearly not for kids as any customer who scans the QR code, goes to the website, accepts cookies, enters their age and postcode, and clicks on the link to BazookAware, will have read, in clear size 7 font, in blue writing on a slightly darker blue background.

What's more, through BazookAware, the industry funds school-based education to help kids understand that bazookas might seem widely available and extremely cool, manufactured with local expertise in time-old tradition, but are for them to enjoy responsibly, as adults. This is partnership in action, so it is high time we stop demonizing the people who manufacture and sell bazookas. Ask yourself, why would companies that exist to sell as many bazookas as possible want to hook a new generation on them, rather than just sell to existing adult customers who already bazooka?

Conclusions

The author hopes that this editorial has allowed the open-minded to see how warped the debate has become on the role of the bazooka industry, and how bazooka-related harms such as explosive deaths are a complex problem with no single cause that could be easily identified, regulated, or made the basis of legal action. This is an issue that cannot be reduced to the demonization of any single factor, but needs partnership, engagement, and more tailored solutions, grounded in science. Not everything is a “commercial determinant of health”, or a “public health” problem requiring a “whole population” approach. It is heartening to see a new totally independent group, Doctors for Responsible Bazooka Ownership, has launched, to campaign that bazookas are not a public health issue, and to fight anti-bazooka bias in medicine. Let us hope that more such organisations will follow, and that we will increasingly follow the science, and as a result, bazooka responsibly.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no competing interests. He has received unrestricted grants from the industry-funded Foundation for Responsible Bazookaing to pursue research on defining problem bazookaing, the role of parental influence on explosive death, the role of peer pressure in increasing bazooka use, and whether bazookas make you appear more attractive. He has also consulted with leading bazooka manufacturers on how to better design warning stickers on bazookas, and helped design and independently evaluate the BazookAware campaigns “Explosive-Free Days” and “How to Bazooka Properly”. None of the funders had any influence over the author, who, again, for the sake of absolute transparency, declares no competing interests.

Recommended Reading

CASSIDY, R. 2014. Fair game? Producing and publishing gambling research. *International Gambling Studies*, 14, 345-353.

DAUBE, M. 2023. Public policy and impact – suggestions for researchers who want to make a difference. *Health Promotion International*, 38.

DOCTORS FOR RESPONSIBLE GUN OWNERSHIP. 2022. Doctors for Responsible Gun Ownership - About [Online]. Available: <https://drgo.us/about/> [Accessed 2/4/2022 2022].

DRINKWISE. 2023. Drinking: Do it Properly [Online]. DrinkWise. Available: <https://drinkwise.org.au/our-work/drinking-do-it-properly/#> [Accessed 2/12/2023 2023].

GOLDBERG, D. S. 2020. Financial Conflicts of Interest are of Higher Ethical Priority than "Intellectual" Conflicts of Interest. *J Bioeth Inq*, 17, 217-227.

HUSSAIN, Z., VAN SCHALKWYK, M. C. I., GALEA, S., PETTICREW, M. & MAANI, N. 2023. A qualitative framing analysis of how firearm manufacturers and related bodies communicate to the public on gun-related harms and solutions. *Preventive Medicine*, 166, 107346.

MAANI HESSARI, N. & PETTICREW, M. 2018. What does the alcohol industry mean by 'Responsible drinking'? A comparative analysis. *J Public Health (Oxf)*, 40, 90-97.

MCCARTHY, S., PITT, H., HENNESSY, M., NJIRO, B. J. & THOMAS, S. 2023. Women and the commercial determinants of health. *Health Promotion International*, 38.

MITCHELL, G. & MCCAMBRIDGE, J. 2023. Interactions Between the U.S. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism and the Alcohol Industry: Evidence from Email Correspondence 2013–2020. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 84, 11-26.

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION. 2023. Eddie Eagle Gunsafe Program [Online]. National Rifle Association. Available: <https://eddieeagle.nra.org/about/> [Accessed 3/12/2023 2023].

PETTICREW, M., KATIKIREDDI, S. V., KNAI, C., CASSIDY, R., MAANI HESSARI, N., THOMAS, J. & WEISHAAR, H. 2017. 'Nothing can be done until everything is done': the use of complexity arguments by food, beverage, alcohol and gambling industries. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 71, 1078-1083.

PETTICREW, M., MAANI, N., PETTIGREW, L., RUTTER, H. & MC, V. A. N. S. 2020. Dark Nudges and Sludge in Big Alcohol: Behavioral Economics, Cognitive Biases, and Alcohol Industry Corporate Social Responsibility. *Milbank Q*, 98, 1290-1328.

SNOWDON, C., TOVEY, M., 2017. *Smoking and the Public Purse*. London: Institute of Economic Affairs.

VAN SCHALKWYK, M. C. I., MAANI, N., MCKEE, M., THOMAS, S., KNAI, C. & PETTICREW, M. 2021. “When the Fun Stops, Stop”: An analysis of the provenance, framing and evidence of a ‘responsible gambling’ campaign. *PLOS ONE*, 16, e0255145.

VAN SCHALKWYK, M. C. I., PETTICREW, M., MAANI, N., HAWKINS, B., BONELL, C., KATIKIREDDI, S. V. & KNAI, C. 2022. Distilling the curriculum: An analysis of alcohol industry-funded school-based youth education programmes. *PLOS ONE*, 17, e0259560.