

Abstract

This paper suggests that history is essential to an understanding of the challenges facing health policy in India today. Institutional trajectories matter, and the paper tries to show that a history of under-investment and poor health infrastructure in the colonial period continued to shape the conditions of possibility for health policy in India after independence. The focus of the paper is on the insights intellectual history may bring to our understanding of deeply rooted features of public health in India, which continue to characterise the situation confronting policymakers in the field of health today. The ethical and intellectual origins of the Indian state's founding commitment to improve public health continue to shape a sense of the possible in public health to this day. The paper shows that a top-down, statist approach to public health was not the only option available to India in the 1940s, and that there was a powerful legacy of civic involvement and voluntary activity in the field of public health.

Keywords: India, Health policy, Development policy, Colonial legacy, Disease eradication, Malaria control

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