

ABSTRACT

Alcohol consumption in Sri Lanka is increasing. This is shown by an increase in the mortality due to Cirrhosis of the liver, especially among males (chronic liver disease and cirrhosis mortality rate per 100 000 was 5.7 in 1983 and 15.1 in 1989). In 1993 the Presidential Task Force on health policy had identified the collection of data related to alcohol use and problems as a priority area for research.

The present study was undertaken to describe the alcohol consumption pattern and people's attitude towards alcohol, and to determine the extent of some health and socio-economic problems related to alcohol consumption in the Gampaha District and to assess the burden of problems related to alcohol consumption on Government Hospitals and the Police Department.

A cross-sectional study was conducted and the necessary data was collected in two stages. In stage 1, a population survey using an interviewer administered questionnaire was carried out to collect data regarding alcohol consumption pattern and people's attitude towards alcohol and to determine the extent of some health and socio-economic problems related to alcohol consumption.

The study sample was selected by a two stage sampling procedure from the 1995 electoral register. 120 individuals were selected by simple random sampling. For each individual selected, nine others were selected from the households listed after their household in the electoral register. This resulted in 120 clusters of ten voters. Each cluster was made up of 5 males and 5 females.

The interviews were conducted by trained interviewers at the respondents houses.

Chi² test and Chi² test for trend were carried out to assess the association between outcome variables based on alcohol consumption and selected socio-demographic variables. The outcome variables used were *ever drinker* (consumed alcohol during lifetime) and *heavy drinker* (consumed alcohol on more than 6 days out of the 14 days preceding the interview). To reduce confounding the relationship between multiple predictor variables and alcohol consumption was assessed by multiple logistic regression analysis. The predictor variables used were age, level of education, social class, household income, religion, marital status, family size and area of residence.

In stage II of the study data regarding identified alcohol related problems was collected from selected hospitals and Police Stations in the area over a period of 3 months.

The results showed that 70% of men and 8% of women had consumed alcohol during the preceding year. The present study showed that 37.7% of men and 1.6% of women had consumed alcohol during the fortnight preceding the interview and these men and women were classified as *regular drinkers*. Among men 15.2% were drinking every other day or more frequently. The average consumption of the *regular drinkers* was 24.1 units per week for men and 6.3 units per week for women. The percentage of men drinking more than 21 units per week was 13.2%. None of the women were drinking more than 14 units per week.

Kasippu contributed 65% of ethanol consumed by the community; Arrack contributed 28% and Beer 3%. Besides Kasippu contributing 65% of ethanol consumed by the community, compared to previous studies the present study results indicated that the use of Kasippu had increased among *heavy drinkers*.

Results of logistic regression showed that *heavy drinking* by male *current drinkers* was significantly associated ($p < 0.05$) with having 3 or more children

(OR=2.16), age over 39 years (OR=2.78) and being in Social class 5 (OR=5.80). It was not associated with religion, marital status, area of residence, educational level or income.

Consumption of alcohol by women at any time during their lifetime was significantly associated ($p < 0.05$) with being a Catholic (OR=7.19) being in Social class 1-4 (OR=2.74) and if married having less than 3 children (OR=1.89).

Women drinkers were drinking with friends and family members and most of their drinking took place at parties. Drinking with family members was not a common practice among men. The lighter drinkers among males drank with friends and work-mates but the heavier drinkers tended to drink alone, either at home or at illicit outlets.

The results also showed that domestic violence against women and children was more likely when the man was a *heavy drinker*. The present study showed that heavy drinking by men was associated with dissatisfaction with the marriage by women. Heavy drinking was not associated with divorce and the prevalence of divorce was very low.

There was almost total disapproval of drinking by the community in the following situations: a man spending time with his young children, drinking during working hours, drinking before driving and drinking by teenage boys.

The proportion of admissions to hospitals of patients with illnesses due to alcohol consumption was 6% in the male medical wards and 0.6% in the female medical wards. Two thirds of these patients were diagnosed to have either Cirrhosis of the liver or chronic liver disease.

Thirty-five percent of cases reported to the minor offenses branch of the police department were associated with alcohol consumption. Among cases of family disputes reported to the Police 76.8% were associated with alcohol consumption.

The community should be made aware of these findings to get their maximum cooperation towards the successful implementation of programmes aimed at reducing problems related to the consumption of alcohol.

The findings of the present study suggest that if state interventions aimed at reducing alcohol consumption are to be effective existing laws should be enforced more effectively to reduce the availability of Kasippu.

Educational programmes should be implemented to educate the drinkers about sensible/ 'safe' drinking. Special programmes should be targeted at young males from lower social classes and the Catholic church could play a role in reducing alcohol consumption in the catholic community.

Counselling services should be made available at or near Police Stations to deal with marital problems reported to the Police and to help people with problems related to alcohol consumption.