

Trends of alcohol consumption in Sri Lanka

P R Kandiah* and S R Chandrasoma

National Dangerous Drugs Control Board

The aim of the paper is to describe the trends of alcohol use in Sri Lanka between 1993 and 2002 based on the statistical reports of the Excise Department. Nearly forty per cent of the Sri Lankan adult males consume alcohol. About half the adult males in lower socio-economic groups consume alcohol. The *Samurdhi* recipients, the poor on social welfare, in the North-Western Province spent 50% more than their welfare money on alcohol and tobacco. The money spent on *kassipu* (moon-shine) was equivalent to 47% of the welfare, arrack 42% and beer 9%. More than 40% of the income of the estate workers was spent on alcohol. The licit alcohol production in the country accounts for only 40% of the total.

The types of commonly consumed alcohol were coconut or molasses based, blended special arrack, malted liquor, toddy and locally made foreign liquor including imported liquors. The illicit liquors consumed were *Kassipu*, adulterated industrial alcohol and other homemade alcoholic brews. The licit alcohol consumption was 122 million litres in 2002. Of that, 47% was malted liquor, 46% arrack, 6% bottled toddy, 1% brandy and 0.1% whiskey. The licit alcohol consumption had increased to 122 million litres in 2002 from 27 million litres in 1969, at the rate of 11% per annum.

Western, Eastern and North-Central provinces reported high malted liquor consumption in 2002. Central, Southern, Northern, North Central, Uva and Sabaragamuwa provinces reported high arrack consumption during the year. Colombo district reported the highest consumption all types of alcohol. Kandy, Nuwara Eliya and Badulla districts reported high consumption of bottled toddy. The increases in per capita consumption of types of alcohol between 1993 and 2002 was arrack 10 litres, malted liquor 8.8 litres and bottled toddy 0.9 litres.

The consumption of alcohol had increased between 1993 and 2002, while the domestic alcohol production based on coconut or molasses had decreased. The shortfalls in these were met in several ways. The production of blended and special arrack using synthetic alcohol had increased since 1998. The production of beer, country made foreign liquor and bottled toddy has increased during the period. The supply of illicit liquor too appears to have increased considerably.

* ravi@nddcb.gov.lk