

Briefing note

Senate Women Caucus

The Effects of Alcohol Consumption on Social Wellbeing



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I. Introduction

The use of alcoholic beverages is common in many cultures¹. People drink alcohol for several reasons - primarily to socialize, celebrate, and relax. However, though drinking alcohol may offer some health benefits², the effects of alcohol on behavior have been the subject of discussion for centuries.

This paper provides information on alcohol consumption and social factors that affect alcohol drinkers. It also examines some policy aspects and how the issues above can be addressed.

II. Overview of alcohol use in Cambodia

In the past, Cambodians mainly consumed alcohol only on special occasions such as New Year, parties, or celebrations. However, today, drinking alcohol has become routine with alcohol consumed during gatherings with friends, relatives, and other social events.

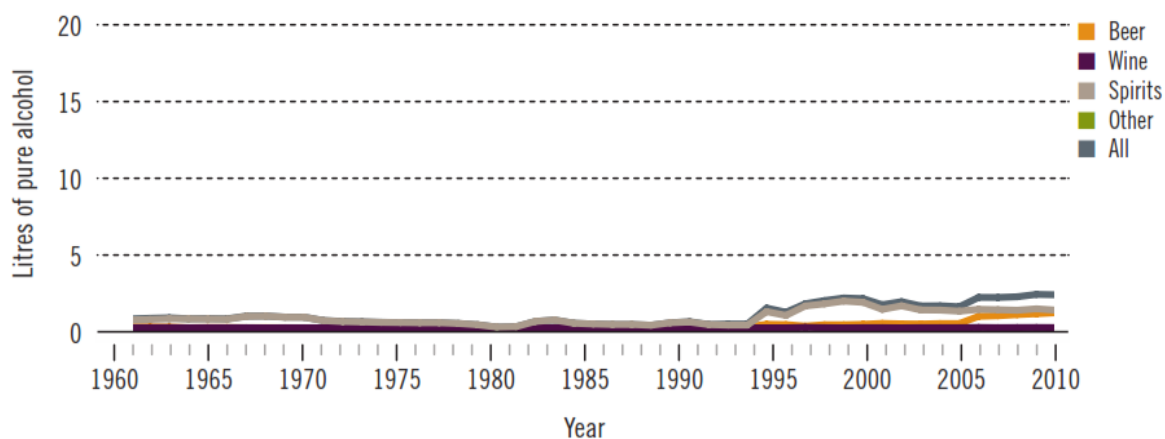
The figure below from the World Health Organization 2014 gives an overview of the trend of alcohol use among Cambodians from 1960 to 2010.

Figure 1

Alcohol Consumption: Levels and Patterns

Recorded alcohol per capita (15+) consumption, 1961–2010

Data refer to litres of pure alcohol per capita (15+).



Source: World Health Organization 2014, Cambodia.

¹ Eniojukan ,Joshua F, "Substance Abuse among Adolescents: Prevalence and Patterns of Alcohol consumption among senior secondary school students in Abraka, Delta State, ." *Scholars Academic Journal of Pharmacy (SAJP)* (Scholars Academic and Scientific), 2015: 63-69.

² Ellison,R. Curtis, and Martinic, Marjana. "The Harms and Benefits of Moderate Drinking:Summary of Findings of an International Symposium ." *Elsevier Monograph Series (Annals of Epidemiology)*, May 2007.

The following are the main reasons that motivate the increase of alcohol consumption in Cambodia:

- Alcohol is considered as a means to build strong networking connections³;
- Unrestricted alcohol advertisements are the major cause of the rise in alcohol consumption⁴; and
- Alcohol related policies and/or regulations on alcoholic drinks and consumption are not yet in place⁵.

III. The social consequences of alcohol consumption

While drinking alcohol is in itself not necessarily a problem, drinking too much has a range of consequences. In 2012, 5.9 percent of all global deaths were attributable to alcohol, and, overall, approximately 3.3 million deaths in 2012 are estimated to have been caused by alcohol consumption⁶. The social impact of alcohol (See Table 2 for details) is often underestimated but it is known to contribute to significant personal, community and familial problems as described in the following sections.

1. Health

Mental health: Alcohol is associated with a range of mental health problems including depression, personality disorders and schizophrenia, all of which contribute to moodiness, memory loss, and risky behavior⁷. Excessive drinking can disrupt normal sleeping patterns, resulting in insomnia and a lack of restful sleep, which can exacerbate stress and anxiety⁸.

Physical health: Like other drugs, alcohol has short-term and long-term effects on the body. Everything from dehydration, cancers and liver disease can be wholly or partially attributed to the excessive consumption of alcohol⁹.

³ International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP) & European Forum for Responsible Drinking (EFRD). (2008). Responsible service of alcohol: A server's guide. Washington, DC: International Center for Alcohol Policies.

⁴ *Global status report on alcohol and health, 2014*, Global status report, Luxembourg: World Health Organization (WHO),

⁵ WHO 2014, Alcohol. p11.

⁶ Ibid, p. 48

⁷ World Health Organization (WHO), 2004, *Global Status Report on Alcohol*. Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Geneva.

⁸ Mental Health Foundation, *Cheers! Understanding the relationship between alcohol and mental health*, London: Mental Health Foundation, 2006.

⁹ WHO 2004, p. 10.

Table 1**Health Consequences: Mortality and Morbidity**

Age-Standardized Death Rates (ASDR) and Alcohol-Attributable Fractions (AAF), 2012				
	ASDR		AAF (%)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Liver cirrhosis	19.1	7.5	65.4	50.0
Road traffic accidents	28.7	9.8	10.2	2.4
*Per 100,000 population (15+).				

Source: *The World Health Organization 2014, Cambodia.*

2. Traffic accidents

Alcohol is one important factor in traffic accidents. According to the Ministry of Public Works and Transport in Cambodia, road accidents are the biggest killers in the Kingdom, and that speeding combined with alcohol accounts for more than half of all traffic fatalities¹⁰.

3. Crime

Research has found that alcohol is present in a substantial number of domestic violence incidents¹¹. It is also a factor in crimes of robbery, assault and sexual misconduct. Surveys carried out by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2009 also reveal that alcohol is the primary reason for violence in the family and in the community. The findings show that alcohol was involved in¹²:

- yelling and cursing, (between 88 percent and 93 percent, and 47 percent and 59 percent, respectively);
- throwing objects (between 12 percent and 18 percent);
- beatings and tying up (between 4 percent and 5 percent); and
- threatening spouses with a knife (between 8 percent and 11 percent).

¹⁰ Handicap International, 2005, *Cambodia Road Traffic Accident and Victim Information System: Annual Report 2004*, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

¹¹ LIM Vannak and SOEUNG Saroeun, 2008, *Road Safety Program Community-Based Education Project*. Evaluation report, Handicap International Belgium.

¹² Ministry of Women's Affairs 2009, "The Violence Against Women 2009 Follow Up Survey", p.79.

Although alcohol and drug use are not said to be the main factors contributing to a rapist's motivation, 10.8 percent of rapists were reported to have been under the influence of alcohol when committing the act¹³.

4. Family wellbeing

Heavy drinking by parents affects family functioning, the parent-child relationship and parenting practices, which, in turn, adversely affect childhood development¹⁴. The mistreatment of children, including sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect, may also lead to childhood mental illness and to problem drinking later in life¹⁵.

IV. Existing policies to control alcohol consumption in Cambodia

Excessive alcohol consumption is reported to have a significant effect on millions and has harmed tens of millions of people each year worldwide (i.e., through diseases and injuries)¹⁶.

While Cambodia has no specific alcohol policies that regulate and restrict how alcohol can be consumed, there are some related laws, sub decrees, circulars, and a national action plan in place, which are discussed below.

- 1. National Strategic Development Plan of Cambodia (NSDP) 2014-2018:** The plan calls for reducing morbidity and mortality of non-communicable/chronic diseases and other public health problems related to substance use, alcohol and tobacco, traffic accidents, injuries and food safety¹⁷. Furthermore, the NSDP also focuses on implementing legislation and regulations related to tobacco and alcohol control, and restricting tobacco and alcohol advertisements¹⁸.
- 2. Law on customs (2007):** All alcoholic beverage products are subject to import duties and taxes as specified in the customs tariff. More importantly, an additional and special tax of 25 percent is applied on imported beer.
- 3. Sub-Decree on Reforming of Excise Tax Rates on Certain Merchandises 2014:** There are increased excise tax rates from 20 percent to 25 percent on 43 alcohol products named in the Cambodian customs list¹⁹.

¹³ WHO, p. 14

¹⁴ Latendresse SJ, Rose RJ, Viken RJ, Pulkkinen L, Kaprio J, Dick DM (2008). Parenting mechanisms in links between parents' and adolescents' alcohol use behaviors. *Alcoholism Clin Exp Res*, 32:322-330.

¹⁵ Shin SH, Pelucchi C, Bagnardi V, La Vecchia C (2009). Child abuse and neglect: relations to adolescent binge drinking in the national longitudinal study of adolescent health (AddHealth) study. *Addictive Behaviors*.34:277-280.

¹⁶ World Health Organization, 2011, *Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health*, WHO: Switzerland.

¹⁷ National Strategic Development Plan, "Chapter IV: Key Priority Policies and Actions 2014-2018", p.181

¹⁸ Ibid. p184

¹⁹ The Royal Government of Cambodia, "Sub-Decree On Reforming of Excise Tax Rate on Certain Merchandises The Royal Government of Cambodia", 2014, Article 1

4. ***Circular on restrictions for broadcasting alcohol advertising and promotion:***
The government of Cambodia has introduced restrictions for broadcasting alcohol advertisements through television broadcasting centres, cable television, and radio FM stations between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. because a large number of people tune in during this time²⁰.
5. ***The Land Traffic Law (2015):*** Anyone who drives under the influence of alcohol with a rate of alcohol from 0, 40 mg per liter of air or 0.8 grams per liter of blood shall be imprisoned from one to six months and be fined from 800,000 riels to 4,000,000 riels²¹.

V. Policy options

To reduce alcohol consumption and its consequences, the Royal Government of Cambodia could consider policy options that include the following:

1. Raising awareness by taking action to address problems related to alcohol through prohibition²², discouraging alcohol consumption among the general population, publicizing the burden it places on the public health system, enacting health promotion campaigns, and utilizing school-based education to promote the non-use of alcohol²³.
2. A pricing policy could help to reduce alcohol consumption through imposing a high taxation rate and increased value added tax (e.g. the value added tax on alcohol beverages in Myanmar is 40 percent)²⁴. The pricing policy should also focus on low cost and youth friendly beverages, which make it easy for this age group to obtain alcohol (e.g., prices for these items should keep pace with inflation and the cost of living).
3. Regulating alcohol distribution by setting clear and binding regulations on:
 - The minimum legal purchasing and drinking age;
 - Restrictions on sales including restricting the number, density and locations of sales outlets; and
 - limiting hours and days of sale²⁵.
4. Imposing significant penalties for drunk-driving or alcohol-related offences. As noted above, driving with a high blood alcohol concentration (BAC) is a major problem and a major cause of traffic accidents²⁶.

²⁰ Ministry of Information, "Circular on restrictions for broadcasted alcohol advertising and promotion", 2014

²¹ National Road Safety Committee (NRSC), Land Traffic Law 2015, Article 77.

²² *Global Strategy to Reduce Harmful Use of Alcohol*. Global Strategy, Regional Office for South-East Asia, India: World Health Organization (WHO), 2009.p8.

²³ *Global Status Report on Alcohol Policy, 2004*, Technical Report, Mental, Health, and Substance Abuse, Singapore: World Health Organization (WHO), p3.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Regional Committee, Alcohol consumption control– Policy Options in South-East Asia Region, p.5.

²⁶ World Health Organization (WHO), 2009, Reduce Harmful Use of Alcohol, India : WHO, p10.

5. Educational campaign on the consequences of alcohol is one of the best strategies. Young people could be the best vehicles for mainstreaming knowledge and information.
6. Since alcohol abuse contributes to a country's economic loss, the government should allocate a reasonable fund to address this issue.

VI. Conclusion

Alcohol is a double-edged sword, offering pleasure and relaxation when consumed in moderation, but leading to social and health problems if regularly consumed to excess. Alcohol misuse not only harms the individual, but damages relationships and society in general in terms of violence, crime and accidents.

In Cambodia, although there are excise duties on beer, wine and spirits, alcohol prices remain among the lowest in the region and regulations and restrictions on the sale or promotion of alcoholic drinks are largely absent.

Measures needed to address this issue could include:

- A rise in the alcohol beverage tax;
- Restrictions on the access to retail alcohol, especially by younger people; and
- Regulating media advertisements and marketing promotion of alcoholic beverages.

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