

Why alcohol control regulation is critically needed in Thailand?

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Alcohol is a substance needed to be restricted and regulated by law. Alcohol consumption becomes one of the major social problems in Thailand. It causes an addiction and leads to harmful consequences. More importantly, the alcohol consumption trend in youth group has increased enormously. The following is more information on the problems arisen from alcohol abuse, statistical data on alcohol consumption, and the alcohol industry's practices in Thailand.

Addiction and harmful consequences:

Alcohol consumption, regardless of the drinking patterns: frequency and consumed amount, causes intoxication, addiction, and alcohol poisoning. It leads to more severe levels of:

- Health problems: liver cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke.
- Accident and injuries.
- Short-term social problems: crime, violence including domestic violence, absenteeism and low performance in workforce.
- Long-term social problems: financial debt, unemployment, divorces, and homeless.

Outrageous alcohol consumption trend particularly in youth group

- In 2004, 16.2 million people drank alcohol which was 32.7 percents of Thai population age 15 and older. (Data Source: National Statistical Office)
- The average of alcoholic beverage consumption was triple within 5 years. The alcoholic beverage consumption rate increased from 20.2 liters per person per year in 1989 to 58.0 liters per person per year in 2003.
- Per capita beer consumption increased 8 times from 4.4 to 39.4 liters per person per year during 1989 and 2003 respectively.
- Within a seven year period, 1996-2003, the number of female teen (age 15-19 years old) who drink alcohol, had increased 6 times from 1% to 5.6 %. 14.1% of this group is a regular drinker who consumed alcohol at least once or twice a week to everyday. The number of male teen (age 11-19 years old) who drink alcohol, was 1.06 million people which was about 21.23 % of people in this group.

- According to World Health Organization (WHO) the alcohol consumption of Thais had increased from 7.71 to 8.47 liters per person per year during 1998 and 2001 respectively. Based on per capita alcohol consumption, Thailand was ranked the 50th in 1998 and the 40th in 2001 in the world. If looking closely on each type of alcohol during 1998 to 2001, the alcohol consumption rank of Thailand moved up from the 9th to the 5th for liquor, the 102nd to the 85th for beer, and the 146th to the 124th for wine.

Harmful consequences:

Accidents

In 2005, the number of traffic accident related injury was 941,880 persons or 1,570 injuries in every 100,000 people. Traffic accidents cost the nation about 2-3 percents of its gross national income which is about 100 billion Baht a year (\$2.86 billion USD.) In addition, alcohol consumption causes 40 percents of traffic accidents during non-festive period and 50-60 percents during New Year and Song Kran holidays.

Domestic Violence

A family with alcohol drinkers has 3.84 times higher chance to experience domestic violence than an alcohol-free family.

Health Problems

Alcohol consumption is the leading cause of over 60 diseases such as liver cancer, heart disease and brain problems. Furthermore, it causes mental and social problems. Alcohol dependents may experience the following symptoms: stress (51.2 %), depression (48.6%), thinking of commit suicide (11.9%), and plan to commit murder (11.3%). Youths, whose father is alcoholic, has 11.5 times higher chances to have psychological problems.

A study of Burden of Diseases in Thailand was conducted by calculating the early death rate and Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs). During 1999 and 2004, the burden of disease caused by alcohol has the second highest rate – after unsafe sex. It increased from 5.8% in 1999 to 8.1% in 2004.

Unrestricted marketing practice for alcohol beverages

Since there was not any specific law restricting marketing practices for alcohol products in Thailand, the alcohol industry manipulated the consumer by implementing several promotional and marketing strategies. They spend over 2,300 million Baht a year (\$65.7 million USD) to create positive images associated with alcohol consumption and to increase consumer's desire to try their products.

In addition, the alcohol industry has well established their distribution channels throughout the country. Consumer's accessibility to alcohol is relatively easy. It only takes about 7.5 minutes for a consumer to travel and purchase an alcohol. Part of the reasons is that obtaining alcohol selling permit is simple and inexpensive for a retailer.

Outdated alcohol taxation law

The current alcoholic production law was written in 1950 and there has not been an increase or adjustment on alcohol taxation. Thus, the alcohol tax rate is considerably low comparing to the inflation rate. As a result, the alcohol price is relatively cheaper than other products. Even though, there might have been some adjustment on alcohol tax rate, the increase was not done evenly across the board. Therefore, the alcohol taxation is not effectively preventing consumers from purchasing alcohol. The consumers simply shift their purchasing decision to lower cost alcoholic beverages.

In conclusion, alcohol is a substance which causes many harmful consequences. The alcohol industry has been manipulating Thai citizens to consume more alcohol beverages by using marketing techniques. To slow down the rapidly growing alcohol consumption and its related problems, an alcohol control law is critically needed in Thailand.