Journal of Farm Sciences **1(1)** : 137-144, 2011

Alcoholism – a social evil among the tribals of Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh

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Kinnaur, a tribal district of Himachal Pradesh is surrounded by Tibet in the east, Uttarakhand and Rohru Tehsil of Shimla district in south, Shimla district in south-west and regions of Kullu and Lahaul and Spiti in north-west. The people here mainly grow wheat, barley, maize and lesser millets like Ogla (*Phagopyrum esculentum*), Phaphra (*P tataricum*) etc. The district is well known for apple. Grapes, pear, wild apricot and wild peaches grow here in abundance. People use these fruits to prepare local liquor called 'Ghanti' in their local language. Taking of alcoholic drinks in their day to day life and also on the ceremonial or festive occasions is quite common among them. Alcohol is distilled at the household level. It is made out of fruits like grapes, apple, wild apricot, pear etc grown locally and of barley (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinnaur district).

Due to climatic conditions and religious reasons, liquor consumption is very common among the people here. Alcohol plays such an important role in their life that even the worship of a deity is considered as incomplete without offering of liquor. In the times of erstwhile rulers, the people were freely allowed to distil liquor. They do so mostly for their own consumption and rarely had occasion to sell it for profit. Though with the application of the Punjab Excise Act 1948, distillation of liquor was made illegal in the state yet it could not be enforced in the district primarily because of the cultural tradition and secondly due to remoteness and inaccessibility of the area. The district administration continues to follow a liberal policy in the effective implementation of excise act. Consequently, due to high extraction of liquor, most of the people have become addicts. Even the school going children below the age of 15 years have started consuming liquor resulting in adverse effects on their health, frequent incidents of quarrel, disputes, accidents, rape, abduction etc. Since no scientific study has been undertaken on alcoholism among the tribals in this geographically and socially

backward district of the state, the present study was undertaken with the following specific objectives:

- To study the present status of production and consumption of alcohol in the district
- To find out the people's perception towards alcoholism
- To determine the people's attitude towards prohibition

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh, in the Kalpa block out of the three blocks viz Kalpa, Nichar and Pooh, purposely as it lies in the centre and is a true representative of the district. From the selected block, four villages namely, Khawangi, Kothi, Duni and Pangi were randomly selected. A random sample of 124 respondents comprising of 108 males and 16 females was selected for the purpose of present investigations. The data were collected with the help of well structured and pre-tested interview schedule by personal interview technique.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study have been discussed as under:

Table 1. Socio-economic personal profile of the respondents (n=124)

S No	Socio-personal trait	No of respondents		%
		Male	Female	
1.	**Age (years)**			
	a) Below 25	18 (16.67)	4 (25.00)	17.74
	b) 25-40	54 (50.00)	8 (50.00)	50.00
	c) >40	36 (33.33)	4 (25.00)	32.26
2.	**Educational status**			
	a) Below middle	48 (44.44)	8 (50.00)	45.16
	b) Middle to higher secondary pass	38 (35.18)	6 (37.50)	35.48
	c) Above higher secondary	22 (20.37)	2 (12.50)	19.35
3.	**Liquor consumers**			
	a) Consumers	96 (88.89)	1 (6.25)	78.22
	b) Non-consumers	12 (11.11)	15 (93.75)	21.78

Figures in parentheses are per cent values

It is evident from Table 1 that a substantial percentage of the respondents (50%) were in the age group of 25 to 40 years whereas about one third were more than 40 years of age. Above one fifth of the respondents were above higher secondary pass, and below 25 years of age. The data further reveal that more than three fourth (78%) of the respondents were liquor consumers. The percentage of the liquor consuming women respondents was found to be negligible. Thus it implies that alcoholism is very common in men. The women rarely use it except for medicinal purpose during illness. But it was very surprising to note that in the study area most of the distillation work was carried out by the women-folk.

The age at which people start drinking

In Kinnaur, offering of drink has been a social hallmark. No one from well to do family has been bothered to disregard this well established practice of offering drink to the guests. The habit appeared to have such a grip that one does not hesitate even to borrow. During fairs, festivals and at any ceremony, the tribal people find a ready excuse to indulge in bouts of drinking. So, it was important to note the actual age at which people start drinking in the district.

A perusal of the date in Table 2 shows that about 40 per cent of the respondents had started drinking with the start of puberty ie between 15 to 20 years of age. One tenth of the respondents had started even before that. Therefore, the study implies that more than 70 per cent of the respondents had started drinking during the age of 15 to 25 years.

Preference for liquor brands

There are four types of fruits, namely apple, grape, wild apricot and wild peach from which liquor is extracted by the local people. Besides, there are wine shops where whisky/rum and spirit/Desi/country liquor are also available. The respondents were asked to give their preference level for various brands/kinds of liquors, and the data have been depicted in Table 3.

As it is clear from the data, substantial percentage of respondents (53.60%) had given their first preference to the liquor prepared from wild apricot/ wild peach followed by grape liquor (27.80%). Those who had given second preference to grape liquor and apple liquor were 38.10 and 27.80 per cent, respectively. In the absence of first and second preference, most of the respondents (53.60%) and (60.80%) preferred apple liquor and whisky/rum as third and fourth alternatives, respectively.

Status of liquor production in Kinnaur

Almost every household has been granted a legal permit by the government to extract

Table 2. Age at which liquor consuming starts (n=97)

S No	Age (years)	No of respondents	%
1.	Below 15	10	10.30
2.	15-20	38	39.10
3.	21-25	31	31.90
4.	>25	18	18.50

Table 3. Kind of liquor preferred by people (n=97)

Brand/kind of liquor	Level of preference (% respondents)				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5 (multiple response)
Grape liquor	27.80	38.10	26.80	7.2	-
Apple liquor	2.00	27.80	53.60	16.40	-
Wild apricot/wild peach liquor	53.60	24.70	7.20	4.10	10.30
Whisky/rum etc	16.40	9.20	4.10	60.80	-

liquor, because the liquor consumption is perceived as a part of social and religious life of the tribal. Though the fee to get legal permit is nominal yet some households were found to engage in illegal extraction of the liquor. Normally as per rule, a family cant extract more than 25 bottles per season but generally the people extract higher than the permissible limit.

Possession of license for extraction of liquor and quantity of liquor extracted

The respondents were asked whether or not they possessed the license for the extraction of liquor and how much quantity of liquor they extracted. The data are depicted in Table 4.

Though more than four fifth of the respondents (84%) possessed the license, yet 16 per cent of them were engaged in illegal extraction. The data have further shown that about 50 per cent of the respondents extracted 25 to 100 bottles of liquor per year. However, those who had extracted more than 100 bottles were 13 per cent. About one tenth of the families were not found to extract the liquor at all. The reason for extraction of liquor beyond the permissible limit is that the tribals have surplus quantity of wild apricot, wild peach apple and pear. They were also found to grow local varieties of grapes, namely Choltu red and Choltu white mainly for extraction of alcohol.

Reasons for liquor consumption

As was already clear from Table 1 that there was a high incidence of liquor consumption among the tribals (78%), it was thus worthwhile to know the possible reasons for severe prevalence of alcoholism among the tribals. The data have been presented in Table 5.

A majority of the respondents expressed that the liquor consumption was customary during festivals, marriages and fairs. Almost an equal percentage of respondents consume liquor for entertainment, and as binding due to village deity. While one third of the respondents took it for getting rid of tiredness, one tenth of them had cited tension release as the main reason for consuming liquor.

It is, therefore, implied that efforts should be made to persuade the tribal people to grow improved quality fruits like apple, peach, grapes, and apricot on an extensive scale so that they can get more

Table 4. Respondents distribution as per the possession of license and quantity of liquor extracted (n=124)

Status of license	Frequency	%
a) License holders	104	83.90
b) Without license	20	16.10
Quantity of liquor extracted (bottles per year)		
a) Nil	11	8.90
b) <25	36	29.00
c) 25-50	35	28.20
d) 51-100	26	21.00
e) >100	16	12.90

Table 5. Reasons for consumption of liquor (n=124)

S No	Reason	Frequency (multiple response)
1.	It has become necessity/ritual during festivals/fairs/marriages	75
2.	Just for entertainment	57
3.	As a ritual due to village deity (ie as 'Prasad' of local Devta)	55
4.	To release tiredness	34
5.	To overcome/tension/boredom	11
6.	As a medicine	7
7.	To overcome cold	7
8.	Miscellaneous	14

economic returns than the one obtained through the sale of liquor from the traditional poorer quality fruits.

Tribals are educationally backward. They enjoy special status of schedule tribe and get free education, scholarships, books, uniforms etc and even reservation for admission to educational institutions. With more and more people being subjected to education it was presumed that attitude of the tribal people might be changing towards alcoholism.

It is evident from the figures in Table 6(a) that 62.50 per cent of the respondents (middle to above higher secondary pass) were not found to consume liquor, whereas, a majority of those (82%) who consumed liquor were below middle pass. This indicates that education might have certainly influenced their thinking towards alcoholism.

On being asked whether or not they favoured drinking, about 39 per cent of the respondents who are middle pass and above higher secondary pass disfavoured drinking whereas the respondents who were below middle pass, and either favouring or indecisive were about 30 per cent. In all, one third of the liquor consumers were found to be undecided (Table 6b).

A perusal of the Table 6(c) clearly indicates that percentages of the respondents who had decided to give up drinking were maximum among the below middle pass (57%) followed by above secondary pas (33%) and middle to higher secondary pass (24%). However, it was disheartening to note that still a substantial percentage of the respondents among all the above three education categories either planned to continue drinking or were undecided to leave it.

Table 6(a). Education vs consumption of liquor

S No	Educatiopn Level	Frequency	
		Liquor consumers	Non-consumers
1.	Below middle (n=56)	46 (82.10)	10 (17.90)
2.	Middle to higher secondary pass (n=44)	35 (75.00)	6 (37.50)
3.	Above higher secondary (n=24)	18 (75.00)	6 (25.00)

Figures in parentheses are per cent values

Table 6 (b). Education vs attitude towards drinking (n=124)

S No	Education Level	Frequency		
		Favour drinking	Disfavour drinking	Indecisive
1.	Below middle	8 (14.30)	28 (50.00)	20 (35.70)
2.	Middle to higher secondary pass	8 (18.20)	24 (54.50)	12 (27.30)
3.	Above higher secondary	6 (25.00)	13 (54.20)	5 (20.80)

Figures in parentheses are per cent values

Table 6 (c). Education vs respondents decision to leave drinking

S No	Education Level	Frequency		
		Decided to leave	Plan to continue	Indecisive
1.	Below middle (n=46)	26 (56.50)	15 (32.60)	5 (10.90)
2.	Middle to higher (n=33) secondary pass	8 (24.20)	21 (63.60)	4 (12.10)
3.	Above higher secondary (n=18)	6 (33.30)	12 (66.70)	—

Figures in parentheses are per cent values

Respondents attitude towards prohibition

The high prevalence of alcoholism among the tribal people adversely affecting their lives should never be allowed to persist. Of late, the government had started a move towards prohibition. Many social agencies/ organizations are engaged to create awareness among the people about the ill-effects of alcoholism. So respondent response on prohibition was obtained and is presented in Table 7(a).

It is clear from the data, a substantial percentage of the respondents (53.20%) favour prohibition in this tribal district of the state, with the women taking the lead. However, two fifth of them were found against it.

It is apparent form the data that the percentages of respondent tribal people who favour prohibition was found to the higher in above higher secondary pass (58%)followed by middle to higher secondary pass (52%), indicating thereby,

Table 7(a). Respondents attitude towards prohibition (n=124)

S No	Attitude	Frequency		
		Male	Female	% of total
1.	Favour prohibition	55 (50.90)	11 (68.80)	53.20
2.	Disfavour prohibition	46 (42.50)	05 (31.20)	41.20
3.	Indecisive	07 (6.50)	—	5.60

Figures in parentheses are per cent values

Table 7(b). Education vs respondents attitude towards prohibition (n=124)

S No	Education level	Frequency		
		Favour	Disfavour	Indecisive
1.	Below middle pass	29 (51.70)	27 (48.20)	—
2.	Middle to higher secondary pass	23 (52.20)	17 (38.60)	04 (9.1)
3.	Above higher secondary	14 (58.30)	07 (29.10)	3 (13.60)

Figures in parentheses are per cent values

that educated people were well aware about the ill-effects of alcoholism and thus support prohibition.

Problems associated with the imposition of prohibition in district Kinnaur

Opinion was elicited from the respondents regarding the problems that might crop up due to prohibition. The problems are ranked and the data are depicted in Table 8.

A majority of the respondents expressed the view that since the religious ceremonies, marriages, fairs and festivals demand use of alcohol, so these ceremonies will not be performed in the absence of alcohol. About one third people also disfavour prohibition on the grounds that their surplus fruits would go waste in case prohibition was imposed. Difficulties in releasing tiredness, boredom and getting rid of cold were some of other problems expressed by them which may crop up with the imposition of prohibition.

Table 8. Problems associated with the imposition of prohibition in the district (n=124)

S No	Problem	F	Rank
1.	Religious ceremonies will not be performed	55	I
2.	Problems in entertaining guests during marriages, fairs and festivals	57	II
3.	A large chunk of fruits will go waste	27	III
4.	Problem in releasing tiredness	13	IV
5.	Problem in getting rid of cold	09	V
6.	Government income will decrease	08	VI

CONCLUSION

It has been concluded from the study that scientific efforts should be made by the scientists concerned for the improvement of local varieties of fruits. Though total prohibition in the district seems to be difficult yet effort can be made to modify the existing rules, higher fees for issuing permit/ license can be charged and the extraction of liquor can be made legalized with quality control as essential condition.

REFERENCES

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Received : 17.9.2010 *Accepted : 21.10.2010*