

# Norms on attractive image given to alcohol among adolescents in state schools in Sri Lanka: Findings of a cross sectional Study

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**Abstract-** The attractive image given to alcohol is a key attraction which drives adolescents to experiment alcohol consumption in their early ages. Thus this study was aimed to identify social norms on attractive image given to alcohol among adolescents and to assess their ability to identify the factors which contribute in building an attractive image around alcohol. A cross sectional study was conducted in two state schools in North Central province in Sri Lanka. Sample size of the study was sixty seven adolescents from 14 to 16 age groups. Eighteen social norms that were assumed to have a commitment to create an attractive image on alcohol were assessed using five-Point Likert-type scales. Adolescent's ability to identify factors of attractive image was assessed by using six closed ended multiple choice questions on the factor concerned. A self-administered questioner was used to collect data. Majority (91%) of the study population agreed that there is no need to care about deeds which done by the drunken people. Similarly, more than 80% of the study sample perceives alcohol use as a comfortable experience to the body and alcohol use as a behavior that can be seen among majority of people in the society. In contrast, more than 75% of the study sample disagrees with the two norms that 'alcohol use can be used as a way to become more attractive' and 'It is true that physical fitness is high among excessive alcohol users'. Major potential source of positive image identified by the adolescents was negative image attached to non-user. More than 50% of the study sample showed an agreement to ten norms out of the eighteen norms that were assessed during the study. Therefore, addressing these prominent norms will be more effective in interventions which design to address the attractive image on alcohol among adolescents.

**Index Terms-** Adolescents, Alcohol prevention, Norms, Sri Lanka

## I. INTRODUCTION

Globally, alcohol is a major public health issue [1-5]. Behavior of alcohol consumption is determined by several factors such as the attractiveness of the image of alcohol, unfair privileges attached to alcohol use, lack of recognition about real harm from alcohol use, forciers that promote increase consumption, alcoholization of all social events, availability of alcohol, less encouragement to quite or reduce and less implementation of policies [6]. Among those, the attractive image given to alcohol is a key attraction which drives adolescents to experiment alcohol consumption in their early ages [7]. Adolescents learn to see alcohol as an attractive thing through, the way alcohol is portrayed in society and the mass media, expectations of pleasure, negative image attached to non-user, symbolic meaning associated with alcohol use and behaviors that are associated with alcohol use and intoxication. [6, 7]

The attractive image of alcohol is irresistibly attractive as a dangerous substance [8]. The less attractive the image of alcohol will hinder regular use, because they are keen to experiment early due to the way they see alcohol. If it is seen as a “rite of passage” in to adulthood or as a something that makes the user feels ecstatic it has grater attraction [6].

According to studies, initiation age of alcohol is varying depending on the country concerned. In US, it is nearly 13.1 years and in Europe, it is more than half of 11 years. However, in some of developing countries the age of experimentation is around 10.1 years [9]. In Sri Lanka, 46.7% current alcohol users are in 15 - 85 age groups [10] and high abstinence reported in the rural areas (75.2%) compared to urban areas (56.6%) [11-13].

Hence, to minimize the associated problems with alcohol, one of recommended way is to delay the age of initiation in to alcohol use [7]. Initiation age of alcohol is important for two reasons. The earlier the age at which adolescents begins drinking, they are more likely to become alcohol dependent later in life. Further, trends in the age of initiation may be used to monitor larger changes in overall drinking patterns among adolescents [9]. In Sri Lanka, according to the International Standard classification of Occupation (ISO 88) the highest percentage on the main occupation of the alcohol users was students (17.5%) [13]. With respect to these the importance of delaying onset of alcohol use through prevention efforts is essential to start from elementary grades. In addition evidence suggests, prevention efforts should focus on preventing the onset of regular drinking before age 21[14].

Social norms appear as the top level determinant in shaping adolescent’s attitudes towards alcohol. These norms are inculcated through several sources which should grab utmost attention of the health professionals who works on alcohol prevention. Most of the adolescents in Sri Lanka initiate their alcohol experience at 16-20 ages [13]. Because peer norms play a substantial role and [15] and school is the setting for strong peer groups, identifying an environment is a vital investment. [16].

Due to above reasons, this study carried out in two selected state schools in North Central province in Sri Lanka with adolescents who are in 16 years (grade 11). This study will contribute to the body of literature in Sri Lanka, by providing data about a key population group which is an important audience for alcohol prevention interventions.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross sectional study was carried out from January 2011 to December 2011 in the Anuradhapura district of Northern Province of Sri Lanka. The study population consisted of adolescents of grade 11 in year 2011. This study was a component of a larger pilot study which targeted to develop an intervention to address social norms to reduce attractive image on alcohol. Study population and sample which was used for the pilot study, used as the study sample for the cross sectional study. Initially, two, Educational Divisions (ED) were selected by means of similar socioeconomic background but with an approximate distance. All the schools were listed as per the inclusion and exclusion criteria, in selected two EDs separately. Two schools were selected through generating random numbers separately from two EDs. Inclusion criteria were, a school which had classes above grade 9 (In Sri Lanka school grades are extended to grade 13), supportiveness of the principle, flexibility of the time tables in schools and supportiveness of the staff members & students. And exclusion criteria included a school which was participated to alcohol prevention program within the last 6 months prior to the intervention. All the Sangilikanadarawa Maha Vidyalaya, the intervention school is situated in the Rambewa ED and Orubedi Siyambalawa Vidyalaya, the control school is situated in the Elahera ED. Both male & female were considered as study subjects and all the adolescents (67) of the intervention (36) and control (31) groups were recruited as the sample.

This study examined prevalence of selected social norms and the ability of adolescent's to identify potential sources which contribute to create a attractive image around alcohol. Social norms to be included in the questionnaire were obtained through past local literature. Eighteen social norms were included in the analysis. Ability of adolescent's to identify potential sources which contribute to create an attractive image around alcohol was assessed by using six closed ended multiple choice questions. Factors were identified through past literature [6]. Pretested self-administered questionnaire, developed by the investigators was used to obtain data. The data were collected from the adolescents at the schools. The caregivers of the adolescents were informed about the purpose of the study and invited to participate through the principal of the selected school. Prior notice was given before visiting in their school and two attempts were taken if the adolescent was unable to meet. Trained data collectors collect data. Descriptive statistics were used to do the statistical analysis by using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 20).Ethical approval for conducting the study was granted from the ethical review committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Rajarata University, Sri Lanka. Informed written consent was obtained from mothers of the selected child prior to data collection. Standard measures were taken to ensure confidentiality of data.

### III. FINDINGS

Response rate within the study population was 100%. All adolescents included in the data analysis.

#### Adolescent's basic socioeconomic and demographic data

Study sample consisted with more females 37 (55.4%) than males (30) 44.6%. According to the table 1, all the adolescents were Buddhists. Majority of the adolescent's fathers were farmers 52 (77.6%) and most of their mothers were housewives 61 (91%). Further, most 46(68.6%) of the adolescent's families monthly income was below Rs. 10,000/=.

**Table 1: Adolescent's basic socioeconomic and demographic data**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	30	44.6
Female	37	55.4
<b>Religion</b>		
Buddhism	65	97
Islamic	00	00
Hindu	00	00
Christian	02	2.9
Other	00	00
<b>Fathers occupation</b>		
Farmers	52	77.6
Forcers	6	8.9
Others	9	13.4
<b>Mothers occupation</b>		
House wife	61	91
Government/ private worker	01	1.4
Others	05	7.4
<b>Monthly income of family</b>		
Below Rs.10,000	46	68.6
Between Rs.10,000 – 25,000	14	20.8
Above Rs. 25,000	7	10.4

**Prevalence of social norms about the way alcohol is portrayed in society and the mass media**

According to table 2, majority of the adolescents 35 (52.1%) agreed that alcohol can be used to celebrate happy occasions. It is considered that, this norm is prevailed due to the way alcohol is portrayed in society and the mass media. So, it is evident that society and media has promoted this norm to a large majority of adolescents.

**Table 2: Prevalence of social norms about the way alcohol is portrayed in society and the mass media**

Norm	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Alcohol can be used to celebrate happy occasions</b>		
Totally agree	19	28.3
Agree	16	23.8
Can't say	4	5.9
Disagree	16	23.8
Totally disagree	12	17.9

**Prevalence of social norms about the expectation of pleasure**

It is interesting to note that most of the adolescents 59 (43.287.9%) accepted alcohol use as a comfortable experience for body. In contrast, majority of the adolescents 52 (77.5%) didn't accept the possibility of using alcohol as a way to become attractive and the fact that physical fitness is high among excessive alcohol users. .

**Table 3: Prevalence of social norms about the expectation of pleasure**

Norm	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Alcohol use can be used as a way to become more attractive</b>		
Totally agree	5	7.4
Agree	6	8.9
Can't say	4	5.9
Disagree	14	20.8
Totally disagree	38	56.7
<b>Alcohol use is considered as a way to engage with the new fashion</b>		
Totally agree	17	25.3
Agree	20	29.8
Can't say	21	31.3
Disagree	4	5.9
Totally disagree	5	7.4
<b>Alcohol use can be considered as a comfortable experience for body</b>		
Totally agree	29	43.2

Agree	30	44.7
Can't say	3	4.4
Disagree	4	5.9
Totally disagree	1	1.4
<b>It is true that physical fitness is high among excessive alcohol users.</b>		
Totally agree	3	4.4%
Agree	7	10.4%
Can't say	5	7.4%
Disagree	22	32.8%
Totally disagree	30	44.7%
<b>The level of enjoyment is high among people who like to use alcohol</b>		
Totally agree	14	20.8%
Agree	16	23.8%
Can't say	9	13.4%
Disagree	11	16.4%
Totally disagree	17	25.3%

#### Prevalence of social norms about the negative image attached to non-user

As per the data in table 4, most of the adolescents 60 (89.5%), agreed that alcohol use as a behavior among majority of the people in society. Contrast to it, majority of adolescents 50 (74.5%) didn't think about people who not use alcohol as weak or just like women.

**Table 4: Prevalence of social norms about the negative image attached to non-user**

Norms	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Alcohol use is helpful to be a special character in the gang</b>		
Totally agree	10	14.9
Agree	11	16.4
Can't say	3	4.4
Disagree	21	31.3
Totally disagree	22	32.8
<b>It is true that people who not use alcohol are weak and just like women.</b>		
Totally agree	6	8.9
Agree	5	7.4
Can't say	6	8.9
Disagree	17	25.3
Totally disagree	33	49.2
<b>Alcohol use is considered as a behavior among majority of the people in society.</b>		
Totally agree	40	59.7
Agree	20	29.8

Can't say	3	4.4
Disagree	2	2.9
Totally disagree	2	2.9

**Prevalence of social norms about symbolic meaning associated with alcohol use**

According to table 5, high prevalent (77.6%) symbolic meanings among adolescents was ‘consuming alcohol has been identified as a way show rebelliousness’. Similarly, the norm ‘consuming alcohol has been identified as a way to show as an adult’ was also prevalent 77.5%). Less prevalent symbolic value was ‘it is true that alcohol need to be consumed if he is a boy’ (58.1%).

**Table 5: Prevalence of social norms about symbolic meaning associated with alcohol use**

Norms	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>It is true that people become more violent after use alcohol</b>		
Totally agree	22	32.8
Agree	21	31.3
Can't say	3	4.4
Disagree	11	16.4
Totally disagree	10	14.9
<b>It is true that alcohol need to be consumed if he is a boy</b>		
Totally agree	15	22.3
Agree	13	19.4
Can't say	0	00
Disagree	10	14.9
Totally disagree	29	43.2
<b>Consuming alcohol has been identified as a way show rebelliousness</b>		
Totally agree	26	38.8
Agree	26	38.8
Can't say	5	7.4
Disagree	4	5.9
Totally disagree	6	8.9
<b>Consuming alcohol has been identified as a way to show as an adult</b>		
Totally agree	46	68.6
Agree	6	8.9
Can't say	3	4.4
Disagree	9	13.4
Totally disagree	03	4.4

**Prevalence of social norms about behaviors those are associated with alcohol use and intoxication**

Most of the adolescents 61 (91%), accepted the norm ‘it is true that there is no need to care about things done by the drunken people’. Moreover, it is also pointed out from the data that majority of them 33(49.1%) also not accepted the norm that unethical deeds conducted under the influence of alcohol should not be taken much in to consideration.

**Table 6: Prevalence of social norms about behaviors that are associated with alcohol use and intoxication**

Norms	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Unethical deeds conducted under the influence of alcohol should not be taken much in to consideration.</b>		
Totally agree	13	19.4
Agree	13	19.4
Can't say	8	11.9
Disagree	15	22.3
Totally disagree	18	26.8
<b>It is true that there is no need to care about things done by the drunken people</b>		
Totally agree	37	55.2
Agree	24	35.8
Can't say	2	2.9
Disagree	3	4.4
Totally disagree	1	1.4
<b>It is not suitable to discuss about domestic matters if a people are drunken</b>		
Totally agree	41	61.1
Agree	12	17.9
Can't say	7	10.4
Disagree	4	5.9
Totally disagree	3	4.4
<b>It is considered that alcohol can be used to forget problems</b>		
Totally agree	11	16.4
Agree	21	31.3
Can't say	15	22.3
Disagree	9	13.4
Totally disagree	11	16.4
<b>It is true that behaviors of the drunken people are totally due to the influence of alcohol</b>		
Totally agree	27	40.2
Agree	26	38.8
Can't say	7	10.4
Disagree	3	4.4
Totally disagree	4	5.9

**Ability of adolescent's to identify factors which create a positive image on alcohol**

According to the table 7, only 12 (13.3%) identified at least 3 factors which helpful to develop a positive image around alcohol. Most of the adolescents 27(30%) identified negative image attached to non-user as a factor which helpful to develop an attractive image around alcohol.

**Table 7: Ability of adolescent’s to identify factors which create an attractive image on alcohol**

Item	Number of students	Percentage
Identification of the factors (At least 3) which helpful to develop an attractive image around alcohol	12	13.3
Identification of the way alcohol is portrayed in society and the mass media as a factor	10	11.1
Identification of the expectation of pleasure as a factor	21	23.3
Identification of the negative image attached to non-user as a factor	27	30
Identification of the symbolic meaning associated with alcohol use as a factor	05	5.5
Identification of the behaviors that are associated with alcohol use and intoxication	24	26.7

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Our findings indicate that the majority of the adolescents 61 (91% perceived the norm ‘it is true that there is no need to care about things done by the drunken people’. In contrast, it is also evident that only 12 (13.3%) of adolescents identified at least three factors which helpful in developing a positive image around alcohol.

Acceptances on prominent social norms which are developing an attractive image around alcohol, which identified by Sri Lankan past studies [17] were measured by this study. These social norms will determine the factors which guide the attractive image of a person. These acceptances denote the traditional thinking pattern of the school age adolescents in a semi urban community in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, according to research, initiation of alcohol and the prevalence of alcohol consumption is high when possess with high acceptance rates for social norms [6]. According to this study, ten social norms can be identified as norms which have the total acceptance rate above 50%. Data from this study suggest a strong possibility of initiation of alcohol consumption or continuation of consumption due to the considerable number of norms have an acceptance rate above 50%. Though this study has not measured the level of other environmental factors in motivating adolescents towards alcohol consumption, these data alone have the capability of proposing the need for properly planned interventions [7].

This study is not fully comparable with other past studies in Sri Lanka as lack of community based cross sectional studies on prevalence of norms. According to a research, in 15 -24 age group 31.2% of the users use alcohol because to be with friends / socialization, 18.8% use to get enjoyment / fun / happy, 18.8% use alcohol to avoid rejection from the group, 9.4% use due to pressure of their friends and 3.1% use to avoid loneliness [13] in the same study setting of the current study. These data showcase a different dimension of the problem as it concerned about reasons for consumptions. Additionally, Samarasinghe [7] has done an interventional research by targeting social norms. This study is comparable with the current study as it used a similar set of norms to the current study, so, justifying the selection for the cross sectional study [11]. Indeed, several global studies showed that peer norms are predictive of adolescents’ willingness to drink. Adolescence is an important transitional phase in which adolescents’ alcohol norms change from abstinence to drinking. Although peer norms are widely believed to affect adolescents’ willingness to drink, there is little

understanding of how these peer influence processes operate. Before effective intervention strategies can be developed to reduce the encouraging effects of peer norms on adolescents' willingness to drink, it is crucial to gain insight in these peer influence processes and to understand which peers have the strongest influence on adolescents' willingness to drink. Additionally, research is lacking on whether adolescents are only influenced by peer norms that promote drinking or also by norms that promote little or no drinking [18].

Social norms are not only indicated social perspectives but also guide action in direct and meaningful ways. Due to the influencing nature of these norms, social-norms marketing campaigns have emerged as an alternative to more traditional approaches designed to reduce undesirable conduct. According to Schultz et al [19] the rationale for the social-norms marketing approach is based on two consistent findings. Those are (a) the majority of individuals overestimate the prevalence of many undesirable behaviors, such as alcohol use among peers and (b) individuals use their perceptions of peer norms as a standard against which to compare their own behaviors. So, this first finding is supported by our data because most of the study population in this study is also perceived alcohol is a behavior among a large majority of the society. So, these kind of social-norms marketing campaigns should target to correct the norms in order to reduce the occurrence of deleterious behaviors. Further according to past studies [20] despite the widespread adoption of social-norms marketing campaigns, evidence for the success of such programs has been mixed. According to the literature, many studies have confirmed the effectiveness of the social marketing approach while other studies have failed to produce substantial changes in behavior. Moreover, some studies [19] indicate that social-norms marketing campaigns have actually increased the undesirable behaviors.

This study revealed social norms on attractive image on alcohol and ability to identify factors which creates an attractive image among school age adolescents of sixteen years of age. Current study data suggests, initiating steps for prevention activities, targeting delaying initiation in to alcohol use as initiation would be strongly indicated by high prevalent social norms. Schools are an important setting for interventions aimed at preventing alcohol use [15-16] because alcohol use typically begins during adolescence and because no other community institution has as much continuous and intensive contact with underage youth, schools can be an important setting for intervention. Further, peer norms appear critical in shaping adolescent involvement with alcohol and school connectedness had direct pathways to alcohol use and those peer norms can serve to make excessive alcohol use appear common and acceptable. Most of the adolescent in Sri Lanka initiate their alcohol experience at 16-20 ages [13]. So, this study again stressed the importance of properly planned interventions on social norms among school age adolescents. These school based interventions are ranged from prevent to delay the onset of alcohol use. Since, social norms are generated and operated at society level it is important to target societal level changes though social norm apparently belongs to an individual [6-7]. According to literature, it has indicated that an intervention targeted on social norms should be theory driven, build personal and social skills helping adolescents resist pressure to use alcohol, involve interactive teaching approaches, use peer leaders, integrate other segments of the population into the program, be delivered over several sessions and years, provide training and support to facilitators, and be culturally and developmentally appropriate [21].

Behavior of alcohol consumption is determined by several factors. Alcohol consumption is triggered when the image of alcohol is attractive. It is also pointed out that the unfair "privileges" attached to alcohol use, lack of the recognition on real harm from alcohol use and forciers that promote increase consumption are important in deciding one's alcohol use. Wider society factors such as alcoholization of all social events, availability of alcohol, less encouragement to quitting or reduction and lack of implementation of policies [6] are playing a moderating role in behavior of alcohol consumption. Social norms have a substantial role in shaping all of the factors. Typically, attractiveness of the image of alcohol has more influence from social norms [7]. This study assessed

adolescents' ability to detect factors which create an attractive image. Since adolescents have a poor ability to detect the factors, early interventions are required to improve the understanding about these factors as the first priority.

Factors of attractive image generate social norms and continue those in the community while influencing behavior. According to a research, younger adolescents often accept the normative behavior of older peers when making behavioral decisions. Adolescents who associate older peer groups are at greater risk for alcohol use than adolescents who do not associate such peers. Previous research has also indicated that media exposure has an impact on the normative perceptions of alcohol use among adolescents [18]. Even though, this study has not assessed above social factors which continuing image on alcohol, several studies highlighted the importance of assessing strategies of media and alcohol industry with adolescents [22] to hinder the social influences. The social norms approach is gained rapid recognition in the recent past. Misperceptions are challenged by this approach. Then the social pressure on the individual will lessen and their own rate of use will fall.

Further, as past studies pointed out, social norms campaigns may consisted with several community based measures. The initial strategy would be to identify the actual and perceived rates of alcohol use. Participatory analysis and presenting this information back to the study population is also recommended. Peer education activities has suggested as the top intervention [23]. Additionally, the social norms approach does not rely on traditional health types of health messages such as negative or fear based imagery and it does not contain any moralistic messages about how the target population should behave or what their attitudes should be. Instead, it aims to empower individuals through enabling them to take informed decision making by encouraging them to question the negative misperceptions on alcohol [24]. Since, social norms can have various degrees in the current study; the methods which identified through past studies can be adapted. And as this study reveals student population's perceptions it is essential to apply student-owned interventions which targets on the majority by considering psychological background of the adolescents by whom design further interventions on this group.

During adolescence, usually, drinking behavior is appeared as a social activity. Their willingness to drink will determine by the respective peer group. Peer relationships and opinion of peers are strongly valued. It is recommended to have further research on peer group influences as social norms provide indirect information about expectation of pleasure and symbolic meanings among a peer group. Research data indicates that adolescents present the conformity to peer norms with the intention of obtaining some of these peers' characteristics [25-27]. So, understanding the peer group is also highlighted by past literature. Some findings of the current study support this. In the current study there were high acceptances on using alcohol to become an adult, rebelliousness and more violent. Also, study sample perceived alcohol use as a high prevalent social activity. Certain peer group values might sharpen these perceptions among individuals though, proper identification is needed prior designing interventions as there was not considerable level of acceptance among the study sample on using alcohol as a way to become attractive and to be a special character in a gang. These two norms can be considered as most direct norms related to a peer group and not much supported for past studies.

## V. CONCLUSION

More than 50% of the study sample showed an agreement to ten norms out of the eighteen norms that were assessed during the study. Therefore, addressing these prominent norms will be more effective in interventions which design to address the attractive image on alcohol among adolescents of sixteen years of age in Sri Lanka.

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