

DRUG AND ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN CYPRUS

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Are Cypriots drinking more? The official statistics on alcohol consumption published in *World Drink Trends 1993* show a dangerous upward trend in alcohol consumption for Cyprus. Based on these statistics, Cyprus is facing a serious alcohol problem. But are these figures correct? In the present study, the official statistics regarding alcohol consumption will be examined.

Alcohol is widely available in Cyprus. Grocery stores as well as bars and restaurants in both communities sell alcohol. Locally manufactured alcohol is very inexpensive. Additionally, in Greek-Cypriot rural communities home manufactured wine is produced, as well as a very potent distilled spirit known as *zivania* (*zivania* is similar to the Italian distilled spirit known as *grappa*). Despite the ubiquitous presence of alcoholic beverages, public intoxication is not readily apparent, i.e., one does not see drunks on the streets or at public gatherings. Those few individuals who appear to be intoxicated are usually foreigners.

The Published Statistics

Reliable statistics on alcohol consumption are available for the areas under the control of the Republic of Cyprus. Data for the present study, unless otherwise indicated, is taken from *World Drink Trends 1993*. According to the authors of this publication, data for Cyprus is rated as very reliable. Moreover, the effect of extraneous variables such as tourism and home production for the Cypriot data is considered by the authors to be negligible. This publication, which is printed annually, is a compilation of information on alcohol consumption and production for about 50 countries. Almost all of Europe is included in the 1993 edition. (Malta and micro-states such as San Marino, however, are not included). A major area of the world that has not been included in this edition is sub-Saharan Africa. Except for South Africa, no data from sub-Saharan Africa has been included.

The publication provides useful comparisons among states on the basis of per capita consumption. In 1991, Cyprus ranked nineteenth world-wide in total alcohol consumption and third in consumption of distilled spirits (brandy, *zivania*, ouzo etc.). Cyprus ranked twenty second in beer consumption and twenty third in wine consumption. What is more disturbing is that the overall trend in total alcohol consumption over the last eleven years (i.e., from 1980 to 1991) has been upwards. Over the same period, alcohol consumption in Western Europe declined by 15.9%

and in Eastern Europe (the Soviet Union was not included in this statistic because of lack of data) by the same proportion. For the European Community the decline was 15.0%.

Adjustments for New Population Estimates

Recently, however, the Department of Statistics and Research of the Republic of Cyprus has revised some of their estimates for alcohol consumption based upon new population figures for Cyprus. The rates of per capita consumption are now lower than those indicated in *World Drink Trends 1993*. In some cases, due to rounding, the new values reported are the same as those previously reported, (see *Table 1* which shows per capita alcohol consumption in Cyprus from 1981 to 1993 and is based on the revised figures). Although, the value for distilled spirits for 1991 remains the same (3.3 litres), its relevant rank in consumption may have dropped from third to fourth. Czechoslovakia, the country which ranked fourth in 1991, also has a per capita consumption of 3.3 litres of pure alcohol for distilled spirits. Consequently, from the data available, one can not tell if the relative rank for Cyprus has changed from third to fourth. For beer, Cyprus moved from twenty second to twenty third and for wine from twenty third to twenty fourth. In absolute terms the value for beer changed from 54.7 litres of beer per capita to 53.2 and for wine from 12.6 to 11.6. The picture for total alcohol consumption is less clear. In absolute terms, the value has changed from 7.5 litres to 7.4 of pure alcohol. It is unclear, however, if its rank relative to other countries has changed. *World Drink Trends 1993* presents its consumption figures only to the first decimal place. Consequently, it lists three countries with the value of 17.4-Ireland ranked twentieth, United Kingdom ranked twenty first and Finland ranked twenty second. Therefore, Cyprus could be the twentieth, twenty first or twenty second country in total alcohol consumption or could remain the nineteenth.

Even with the revised data, the upward trend in alcohol consumption remains. From 1980 to 1991, total alcohol consumption increased in Cyprus by 57% litres, i.e., from 4.7 litres of pure alcohol per capita in 1980 to 7.4 in 1991 (see *Table 1*). During this period, only Brazil (176.9%) and Cuba (63.6%) had greater proportional increases in alcohol consumption. Data, though, for both Brazil and Cuba is classified as less reliable, suggesting that some of their increase could be spurious, i.e., a product of data error. As stated previously, both Western and Eastern Europe experienced a decline during this period in contrast to Cyprus.

Table 1: ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION IN CYPRUS
Per Capita
1980 To 1993

Year	Distilled Spirits Litres Pure Alcohol	Beer Litres	Wine Litres	Total Litres Pure Alcohol
1980	2,0	32,6	9,3	4,7
1981	2,1	34,8	10,1	5,1
1982	2,1	36,6	11,1	5,3
1983	2,3	39,4	11,1	5,6
1984	2,3	39,4	11,1	5,7
1985	2,4	42,0	11,9	5,9
1986	2,6	44,5	11,9	6,3
1987	2,7	46,7	13,2	6,6
1988	3,0	50,5	13,7	7,2
1989	3,0	53,9	13,5	7,3
1990	3,1	56,3	13,3	7,5
1991	3,3	53,2	11,6	7,4
1992	3,8	61,8	13,8	8,5
1993	3,4	53,8	12,8	7,6

Note: Distilled spirits and total are expressed in litres of pure alcohol. Beer and wine are expressed as litres of the appropriate beverage. Total alcohol for the years 1989 were calculated using the conversion factors for beer and wine for Cyprus used by the Productschap voor Gedistilleerde Dranken of the Netherlands, i.e. 0,05 for beer and 0,12 for wine.

Source: World Drink Trends 1993, p. 40 and the Dept. of Statistics and Research.

The Impact of Tourists

It should be noted, however, that the total alcohol consumption for Cyprus declined from 1990 to 1991 by about two tenths of a litre of pure alcohol, i.e., from 7.7 litres of pure alcohol to 7.5. This decrease was due to a decline in beer and wine consumption. Consumption of distilled spirits, in contrast, showed a slight increase during this period. This reduction in consumption could be due to the downturn in the Cyprus economy due to the Gulf War. More importantly, some of the decline in consumption may be the result of a reduction in consumption by tourists. Moreover, the decrease in tourism probably accounts for the down turn in the economy, since tourism is such a large industry in Cyprus. Interestingly, there was no decrease in

consumption of distilled spirits, instead it increased. This suggests that, if the consumption by the tourists is not negligible for the overall consumption of alcohol beverages as has been assumed, it appears to be negligible for distilled spirits. This data tend to confirm anecdotal reports that Greek-Cypriots are drinkers of brandy and ouzo.

, Data for 1992 and 1993 is available from the Department of Statistics and Research. Consumption in all three categories in 1992 exceeded their values for 1990, continuing the upward trend. Consumption of distilled spirits in 1992 reached 3.8 litres of pure alcohol per capita. Nevertheless in 1993, all three categories showed a decline. Beer and wine dropped below their values for 1991; wine dropped below its value for 1989. Distilled spirits, however, only dropped to 3.4 litres of pure alcohol. There was only a modest decline in tourism in 1993, so a reduction in tourism cannot account for most of the reduction. The number of tourists for 1993, although 7.5% less than for 1992, was still sizeable since it was more than a quarter of million greater than the number of tourists who visited Cyprus in 1990. A general down turn in the economy as well as the imposition of new taxes are other factors that may have affected the alcohol consumption during this period.

Clearly, the impact of tourism on alcohol consumption is not negligible, as is stated in *World Drink Trends 1993*. The decrease in consumption in 1991 which was due, at least in part, to the decline in the number of tourists, caused by the Gulf War, suggests this. Nevertheless, there was no decrease in consumption of distilled spirits at this time. As stated previously, this suggests that the consumption by the tourists is not negligible for overall consumption of alcoholic beverages as has been assumed, but it can be considered negligible for distilled spirits. Furthermore, the data for consumption of distilled spirits makes no allowance for home manufacturing of distilled spirits which still goes on in villages. It is generally believed that the home distillation of spirits is on the decline. Nonetheless, the impact of tourist consumption on the estimate of the total amount of distilled spirits consumed by Cypriots may be, at least partially, offset by the home manufacturing of distilled spirits which is not included in the estimate. Additionally, members of the British forces, the Greek force and United Nations forces, are entitled to purchase duty free liquor. It is believed that small numbers of these duty free bottles pass into the general population. Although the amount is small, it helps to mitigate the impact of tourist consumption during 1991 which indicates that the consumption of these beverages is impacted by the number of tourists. Upon closer inspection, the consumption of wine appears somewhat erratic, i.e., it has not been increasing steadily. For example from 1988 to 1989 when tourism increased by 24% from the previous year, wine consumption decreased slightly. In contrast, the consumption of beer has been steadily increasing along with the increase in the number of tourists. It is probably reasonable to conclude that the consumption figures for both beer and wine consumption are strongly affected by tourists consuming these bev-

erages. Still, factors other than tourism are probably also significantly influencing the estimates for wine consumption. Given that no license is required for the manufacture of wine and no special tax is levied on domestically produced wine, it is possible that the estimates for the home manufacture of wine may be inaccurate, which may account for the erratic pattern in the consumption data.

If tourism does significantly impact upon the consumption of alcohol, then how much of the consumption of alcohol beverages is due to the consumption by the tourists? Unfortunately, this cannot be answered with the available data. However, if the available data on tourism are examined, a feeling for the magnitude of the impact of tourist consumption can be obtained. If one takes, for example, the number of tourists for 1992, a record year and multiplies this by the average length of stay (1,255 days) and divides the result by 365 to annualise the value, an additional 68,185 people are added to the population—an increase of 11% to the total population. Most of these additional people are adults and therefore more likely to drink alcoholic beverages than children. If we assume that 90% of the tourists are over the age of 15 years, then it is like adding 13% to the population of over 15 years, then it is also like adding 13% to the population 15 years and older. Furthermore, most of the tourists are on holiday (some are in Cyprus for business) and thus, more likely to drink. Tourist consumption could, therefore account for 10% to 30% of the consumption of beer and wine. Even at the higher rate, there would still be an increase in the per capita consumption of alcohol due to the increase in consumption of distilled spirits.

The only data that appears to question the high rate of consumption of distilled spirits are anecdotal reports of the clandestine shipping of brandy into the occupied areas. How much brandy from areas under the direct control of the Republic of Cyprus enters the occupied areas is unknown. If significant amounts of brandy are transferred then this would alter the consumption patterns that were discussed above.

Although per capita alcohol consumption cannot be automatically converted into alcohol abuse, the relatively high rate of consumption of distilled spirits combined with a general upward trend in alcohol consumption is alarming. Furthermore, it is not simply the amount of alcohol consumed that determines alcohol abuse, but the quality drunk. For example, in the later stages of alcoholism it may take relatively modest amounts to become inebriated. Also, a moderate drinker who drinks and drives while he is under the influence (i.e., his driving is impaired) can be considered as an abuser of alcohol.

Another factor to be considered is the impact the tourists have on consumption by Cypriots. We do know that there is a higher concentration of drinking establishments in tourist areas. This increased availability and presence of alcohol probably encourages Cypriots to drink or at least makes it easier for them to drink. Moreover, a textbook on tourism (Macintosh and Goeldner, 1990, p. 192) observes that:

On a national basis, people of a particular country can have their lives changed by tourism, particularly if there are large numbers of tourists in proportion to the indigenous population. Visitors may influence ways of dressing, consumption patterns, desire for products used by tourists, sexual freedoms, and a broadening outlook on the world.

Additionally, the text (*ibid.*) notes that: "Extensive tourism development can bring undesirable social effects such as an increased prostitution, gambling, drunkenness (*sic*), rowdyism, unwanted noise, congestion, and other excesses."

With the large number of tourists visiting Cyprus, it seems likely that the behaviour of these tourists has some influence on Cypriot drinking patterns. For example, bars and pubs (i.e., an establishment whose primary purpose is the drinking of alcoholic beverages) appear to be a foreign import. They are particularly prevalent in tourist areas. Not only are they found in large hotels, they also exist as separate establishments in these areas. In villages outside of tourist areas, bars generally do not exist. Drinking in public in these areas occurs in restaurants and coffee houses. Although heavy drinking can and does take place in these restaurants, the drinking is usually accompanied by quantities of food that mitigate the effects of the alcohol. The availability of bars in Cyprus provides a venue where drinking is the primary activity, if not the sole activity, exercised while socialising. A bar changes the context of drinking from an activity carried out in concert with activities (e.g., eating, dancing or entertainment) to one where drinking is central. Moreover, bars are beginning to appear in large villages outside the tourist areas. Unfortunately, the influence of the tourists on Cypriot drinking cannot be estimated.

Survey Results

It is generally believed that, although the per capita consumption is relatively high, consumption of alcohol in Cyprus is more evenly distributed throughout the population than is the case with other countries. In other words, most people drink some alcohol rather than a few people drinking a lot. Furthermore, it appears to be the common wisdom that excessive drinkers do not exist in Cyprus. A telephone survey using a sample of individuals 18 years and older was conducted by the author during the fall of 1994. Surprisingly, fewer drinkers were found than were expected, based upon general discussions with relevant individuals and anecdotal information. Most likely, many individuals who answered 'no' to the question concerning lifetime drinking either drink occasionally or are not currently drinking, but drank in the past. Often a person who drinks only on special occasions will answer 'no' to this type of question. Unfortunately, the interviewers were not trained to challenge a 'no' response on this question; the data was simply recorded as stated.

Of the 601 people interviewed, about half (302) stated that they never drank al-

coholic beverages. Those that said they had drunk alcoholic beverages were asked if they had drunk any alcoholic beverages within the last 12 months. About 90% (271 out of 299) answered 'yes'. A little more than a fifth (23%) of those who reported that they drank alcohol within the last 12 months, indicated that they drank alcoholic beverages daily. This data suggest that there is more diversity in the frequency of drinking than is generally acknowledged.

Not surprisingly, beer is more popular than wine- 61% said they usually consume wine, while 84% reported that they usually consume beer. Concerning distilled spirits, 39% reported that they usually consume brandy, 28% whiskey, 26% ouzo and only 3% *zivania*. Moreover, not only does a greater proportion of the population drink beer than wine, but beer tends to be consumed in greater quantities than wine. About two-thirds (66%) of those who drink wine reported that on average during the last 12 months, when they drank wine, they drank the equivalent of one or two glasses (standard measure for wine) of wine per occasion. In contrast, less than half (46%) of beer drinkers reported that they drank the equivalent of one or two glasses of beer (standard measure for beer) per occasion. About a sixth (17%) of beer drinkers reported that they drank the equivalent of more than six glasses of beer per occasion, while only 4% of wine drinkers reported they drank the equivalent of more than six glasses of wine per occasion.

When asked if they had within the last 12 months drunk the equivalent of five or more drinks of wine, beer, brandy or *ouzo* or mixed drinks for other distilled spirits, more than two-thirds (68%) of those who drank within the last 12 months said they did. Moreover, 6% of those who drank five or more drinks reported that they did this daily and 4% two or three times a week. (The caveat mentioned earlier about inferring alcoholism from the amount of alcohol consumed should be kept in mind). Those that drank heavily tended to drink brandy or beer rather than wine.

Data from the Turkish-Cypriot Community

Although the data on the Turkish-Cypriot community is more sparse than that for the Greek-Cypriot community, a similar picture emerges. During the summer of 1994 an article entitled "Are we becoming alcoholics?" appeared in the Turkish Cypriot newspaper *Kibris*. According to the article the consumption of imported alcoholic beverages increased by 107% in 1992 compared to 1991; making 1992 a record year for the importation of alcoholic beverages. The consumption of domestic alcoholic drinks also increased during this period, but by only 12.7%. In 1992, the two most heavily imported alcoholic beverages (in terms of money) were whiskey and beer. *Raki* (a Turkish drink that is the equivalent to *ouzo*) was number three.

Conclusion

Alcoholism and alcohol abuse are not the only consequences of excessive alcohol use. Although moderate use of alcohol may have positive benefits on health,

excessive use can result in various health problems such as cirrhosis of the liver. For example, in the United States, the use of alcohol by pregnant women is the leading preventable cause of mental retardation in children. Moreover, excessive use of alcohol is implicated in heart disease and some forms of cancer. At present there is no evidence that there is a high rate of cirrhosis of the liver in Cyprus. Nor would one expect a high rate, since the high levels of alcohol consumption in Cyprus are relatively recent. Unfortunately, there is no data available in Cyprus on the impact of alcohol on other health problems.

In conclusion, based on an analysis of the available data, the actual consumption levels for Cyprus are not as high as those published in *World Drink Trends*. Revised population estimates, as well as the consumption by tourists suggest that the per capita consumption is less than what has been published. Unfortunately, the impact of tourist consumption cannot be calculated from the available data. Consequently, revised figures that take into account this factor, as well as the new population estimates cannot be generated. Despite these difficulties in estimation, a dangerous upward trend in alcohol consumption still exists. Additionally, the behaviour of tourists could be influencing Cypriot drinking patterns and may account in part for the increase in alcohol consumption by Cypriots.

Moreover, if the upward trend continues, Cyprus will soon face problems related to alcohol use. (The decline in overall alcohol consumption from 1992 to 1993 is not necessarily indicative of either a decline or a stabilisation in alcohol consumption). At present, there is no evidence to suggest that alcoholism and related ailments are serious problems in Cyprus. What little data there is, suggests that alcoholism is currently a modest problem directly affecting small numbers of people. Nevertheless, the recent high levels of consumption of distilled spirits is quite high and may be a harbinger of a future increase in alcoholism and alcohol related problems. If alcohol consumption levels continue to rise, Cyprus most certainly will face a severe problem of alcoholism. The government needs to increase its prevention efforts concerning alcohol abuse. Clearly, there is a need to educate the public concerning the effects of alcohol. A campaign to discourage excessive drinking is needed.

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