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INTRODUCTION

Although the number of publications on alcohol related problems have been increasing in recent years, with a exceptions, most of the studies have used localized non-probability samples of both Junior High School and High School students whose age is between 15-18. Hence there is little systematic evidence on drinking patterns of teenagers, since studies with national probability samples have typically begun at age 20. Available data shows that, nearly two third of adolescents are at least occasional drinkers, despite the fact that the sale of alcoholic beverages to persons under age of 20 is illegal in Japan. Suzuki (1993) et al. found that 12% of adolescents are problem drinkers and further they found that, 10 years before, this figure was only 1%. It was reported that 21.8% drank 3-6 cups of liquor, 5.9% drank, 6 cups of liquor and 9.4% drank alcohol to the extent of getting drunk. Widely available research has shown that frequent intoxication and it's resulting negative consequences, represent severe problems for adolescents. These figures are cause for alarm, because any alcohol consumption by this age group is illegal and the safety of this level of drinking can certainly be defined as problematic.

(I) SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS OF ADOLESCENTS DRINKING BEHAVIOR

Drinking is a social behavior with a large number of sociologically

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relevant causes and consequences. Research in this area remains a promising and by no means exhausted field which can illuminate issues of general interest to sociologists as well as to the specialists in medical sociology or deviance (Bucholoz and Robins, 1989).

Research on teenagers and alcohol indicates that, since consumption of alcohol is a "rite of passage" into adulthood and adolescence involvement with alcohol can be viewed as a normal and inevitable component of the developmental process (Jessor and Jessor, 1975). Research has also indicated that although alcohol consumption among teenagers is seen as problematic, it is a symptom of a more general and typically transitory developmental syndrome (Donovan et al., 1983). Further Jessor and Jessor's empirical research supports the social learning-transitional hypothesis. Their findings indicate that, teenage drinking is an 'integral' aspect of the process of adolescent development as a whole (Jessor and Jessor, 1975).

It has been argued that based on its established universality among teenagers, this syndrome is characterized by a deviation from conventionality. Further more it manifests itself in the common developmental process of all youth (Jessor and Jessor, 1975). Since a problem with alcohol is part of the symptom or is a generalized syndrome, it has been argued that intervention based on problems with alcohol is inappropriate (Donovan and Jessor, 1978).

Based on the traditional interpretation of labeling theory, as well as Erikson's (1968) views on adolescent development, the imputation of the alcoholic characterization upon teenagers serves to perpetuate deviant drinking rather than to extinguish it. This consequence is based on the assumption that teenagers will alter their self-concepts to accommodate the alcoholic label and experience exclusionary reactions from others which perpetuates their deviancy.

Alcohol use is embedded in a variety of forms of deviant behavior. It has been well established by the widely available research, that initiation and progress of adolescent substances use, drinking and smoking are highly correlated (Kandel and Logan, 1984), Kandel and Yamaguchi (1992) Matsushita et al. (1996) and Fukui and Wada (1994) show that alcohol use functions as a gateway to illicit substance use and is itself predicted by a lack of identification with school achievement and conventional attachment to

parent's values. In addition, Yamaguchi and Kandel (1984), have shown that conduct disorder in childhood predicts unusual early use of alcohol and the development of alcohol problems. Suzuki et al. (1993) have found that a majority of problem drinkers have had drinking parents, family problems and simultaneously used other addictive substances such as thinner and tobacco.

In addition to these other scientific evidence suggests that the age of the first exposure to alcohol is associated with an increased rate of later alcohol consumption and alcohol related problems. This is in parallel with findings from other research which has shown that early patterns of alcohol consumption are prognostic of later alcohol consumption and related behaviors. In short, all this evidence suggests that the early childhood consumption and use of alcohol may be associated with increased risks of alcohol consumption and alcohol related problems in adolescence. These evidence demonstrates the necessity of approaches that reduce adolescent alcohol misuse and alcohol related problems by limiting alcohol availability to young adult populations.

Data and Method

This article draws in part on previous survey data materials presented in the various journals on alcohol related problems in Japanese society and discusses them in relation to their impact on the minors alcohol prohibition law. In addition, this article partly is my observation of alcohol related problems and their relationship with overall alcohol policy in Japan, which has been greatly influenced by alcohol sociologist Prof. Shimizu Shinji of National Institute of Mental Health — His association has greatly strengthened my knowledge with regard to alcohol related problems in Japanese society. Prof. Iwase Nobutada of Tsukuba University, Prof. Shimizu, and Prof. Yokoyama of Kokugakuin University of Tokyo, have eased my transition into Japanese alcohol sociology. They have provided intellectual stimulation that has contributed a lot to my understanding.

(II) LIMITING ALCOHOL AVAILABILITY AS A SOCIAL REGULATIONS OF THE TEENAGE DRINKING

Efforts to control the use of intoxicating substances through diverse

restrictive legislations are common in modern societies. Social response to alcohol problems may be thought of in two areas;

- (I). policies aimed at the control of alcohol, which we will call public control strategies and
- (II). policies aimed at deviant drinkers, which we will call personal control policies.

Public control policy is defined by Room (1984) as "any intervention by the state in controlling the production, distribution and sale of alcohol as a means of preventing alcohol problems". Examples are; excise taxes, licensing of vendors, and limiting advertising. Examples of personal control policies are laws against drunk driving, laws setting a minimum drinking age, and provision of treatment.

Alcohol control policies have been studied widely in recent years. After the classic work of Brunn et al. (1975), a number of studies have represented that restrictions on access to alcohol as a preventive measure. According to the Brunn et al. (1975) many factors are well known to influence the consumption of alcohol, such as accessibility of alcohol, pricing and alcohol habits in the social net works of the individuals. They noted that in many respects, alcoholic beverages behave like other commodities in the market, so that their consumption is affected by their price level and that the availability of alcohol is an important factor in the general level of consumption. One major factor frequently cited as determining decreasing access to alcohol is the increase of minimum legal age for purchasing and consuming alcoholic beverages (Edwards et al., 1994). In addition, studies have revealed the risk factors associated with the use and misuse of alcohol during adolescence.

Special protection of young people by restricting alcohol availability to them is therefore a major sub category of alcohol control policy. Further research has shown that heavy drinking is associated with social and behavioral problems and heavy drinking environments. Smart (1980) has reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature and suggested a broadened conception of availability which, in addition to the physical availability of alcohol would include social and subjective dimensions of availability. In arguing that consumption is determined both by the physical availability of alcohol and by social and psychological factors, Smart is explicitly modeling the process of consumption as a function of the socio-cultural milieu in which

the individual is embedded. All of these findings, suggests an availability provenance theory of heavy drinking (Smart, 1980, 1993). This theory suggests that heavy drinking and drug use results from the interaction of two-factors: availability of alcohol and provenance to use it heavily. When both of these factors are high, it would result in heavy drinking. Availability refers to how easily alcohol is obtained. In a broad sense there are many factors involved in the availability of alcohol (i.e. price relative to a disposable income, frequency and size of outlets, social attitudes ...) According to the single distribution theory an increase in the availability of alcoholic beverages in a general population is associated with an increase in its average consumption. Consequently it increases alcohol related damage in the population.. Any measures, such as those regulating the availability of alcohol, which may be expected to affect overall consumption are also likely to affect the prevalence of alcohol problems, and hence should be a major consideration in any program of prevention. In other words, measures that may affect overall consumption, should be a central consideration for public policy. Some measures that regulate alcohol availability, have shown an important role with respect to consumption and related health and social damage.

Many of the laws regarding alcohol are regulatory and/or protective in nature and most societies have a body of criminal law pertaining to the purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Arrest, prosecution, and conviction statistics for behavior in violation of these laws provide one index how one society is enforcing existing laws. Moreover rates of arrests for drinking related behavior of juveniles can be interpreted as a reflection of the differences in the extent to which their conduct is viewed as problematic to the society. When society endeavors to control undesirable behavior it employs methods that differ in fundamental ways, but the underlying objective is that, sanctions may deter undesirable behavior. And why should society sometimes engage in outright prevention of acts such as prohibition of drinking by youths, as law should seek to postpone the introduction to alcohol as long as possible or at least up to the age where one could develop healthy attitudes toward alcohol use. In Japan, various research findings suggest that (Kuriyama et al., 1984, Yokoyama et al., 1969) the early initiation of alcohol drinking in youth increases the chances of development of alcohol

dependence. This law therefore is considered to be appropriate for postponing the age at which alcohol drinking is initiated and for decreasing the incidence of alcoholics especially in adolescents of the society. This societal reaction perspective emphasizes that age limits exercise a restraining influence and usually lead to a restriction on alcohol consumption by adolescents and reduces their alcohol related problems. Therefore most countries prescribe a legal minimum age for purchasing or consuming alcoholic beverages.

(III) BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MINORS ALCOHOL PROHIBITION LAW AND PRESENT TREND OF UNDER AGE DRINKING

The Prohibition Law for minors (age 20) was passed in 1922 and efforts have been continued to increase the age limit to 25 years. The effects of the war and the American occupation has greatly reduced the effectiveness of the temperance movement. However, they are again more active in encouraging public education on alcoholism and raising the minimum drinking age (Moor, 1960).

A Prohibition law for minors was instituted on First, April, 1922. Ever since the temperance organizations have fought to raise the obligatory abstinence age to 25 (Yamamuro, 1954). This law was legislated in 1922 to protect youth, who were still developing mentally and psychically, from evil effects of alcohol drinking. Article I prohibits minors (younger than 20 years old) from drinking alcohol and prohibits dealers from selling alcohol to minors. It further instructs parents and guardians to direct minors to avoid alcoholic beverages (Kuriyama et al., 1984).

Minors alcohol prohibition bill appeared before the Diet 30 times and passed the House of Commons 11 times, it was thwarted by the (majority of) House representatives due to the economic interests of brewers, who voted against the bill. Finally in 1922, the law, prohibiting the sale of alcohol to minors was enacted. Although the present law limiting the sale of alcohol to people under 20 years is virtually unenforced, the Japanese Temperance Union (JTU) still holds the objective of raising the minimum age to 25 years. This could be further generalized as in 1990 statistics show that there were only 62 prosecutions of under age drinkers, and at the same time only 23

dealers were punished for serving alcohol to the teenagers (White paper on Police 1990). More than 154,000 arrests for all Juvenile offences were reported, and only 0.04% represented alcohol related Juvenile cases. That is, incidence of arrests of young people for liquor law violations and alcohol related traffic law violations are disproportionately lower while their arrests for other anti-social behavior is significantly higher. These figures illustrate that different anti-social behaviors (consuming alcohol by a Juvenile is against the law, at the same time juvenile theft is also against the law) are treated in different ways in the Japanese society. Interestingly, Japanese youths are more frequently arrested for all other offences than liquor law offences and considerable differences exist in the percentages of juveniles arrested for alcohol offences and all other offences. In short, the perception of social character problems or juvenile drinking problems in any society could vary depending upon how much effort is devoted to its control. Further it reflects society's attitude toward alcohol and related behavior. It seems that people do differ as to whether such behavior is important or such conduct is "really wrong" or even what constitutes the prescribed conduct in question. Erickson (1966) for example points out that "each society is exercising a cultural option when it develops a characteristic way of looking at deviant behavior....." for the way in which this option is exercised has a profound effect not only on the forms of deviance a society experiences, but also especially on the way the society responds to it.

Cultural and social factors influencing youth drinking behaviour.....

In general some scholars have cited that the 'cultural imperialism' which came from the west as a significant contributory factor in the sharp increase in alcohol related problems in the post War II period in Japan (Gredig, 1979). Since World War II there have been many changes in Japanese society. There was an influence of American occupation, rapid urbanization and industrialization on the traditional Japanese culture. Those changes have greatly influenced on the traditional values of the society. Accordingly, Japanese society experienced rapid increased in alcohol consumption (Kitano et al., 1992).

If the young Japanese continued to be raised on today's hybrid Japanese American culture, they are more susceptible to be alcoholics in the future.

Available data, from the various surveys which assert that drinking among teenagers is alarmingly increasing. On the other hand resulting diversification of the consumption habits usually leads to an increase in the overall consumption. In Japan, the average rate of alcohol consumption per capita increased two fold from 1955-1980. The annual alcohol consumption per capita among 15 year olds and above has risen from 7.0 liters of pure alcohol in 1978 to 8.0 liters pure alcohol in 1988. Further, in 1990, it had increased up to 8.87 of pure alcohol (Annual Report of Mental Health, Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1991). Nevertheless, it has been estimated that half of Japanese population are flushers, and those persons who 'flush' reported a lower frequency and quantity of alcohol consumption and less frequent intoxication. Therefore it is reasonable to be hypothesised that, half of the Japanese population, consume most of the 8 litres of pure alcohol. The aforementioned per capita consumption increases may partly reflect material changes in alcohol availability, improved production or distribution practices, rising affluence, decreasing prices, and images of drinking behavior promulgated by the mass media through aggressive marketing campaigns and the shift to a consumer society.

Alcohol products with innovative use, and values are being introduced by the alcohol industry through effective media campaigns. The build-up of the sophisticated production and distribution network, aggressive marketing strategy, price mechanism, change of alcohol import policy, and recent deregulation of alcohol production would have created vested interests which tend to operate as a ratchet mechanism pushing the trend of alcohol related problems only in one direction. It is important to note here that, as the consumption levels increase in any given society, the rates of problems related to drinking also rise, although often with a considerable time lag. For example, at the individual level it takes some years of heavy drinking to destroy a liver, and perhaps some years for a family to get fed up with role failure of heavy drinkers. The societies response to the increased problems tend to lag still further behind.

In 1993, Japanese schools have included health and physical education courses which are supposed to include information about the danger of abuse of alcohol and other drugs and tobacco. But cursory instruction is ineffective. Why should school boards in prefectures and municipalities not begin now to

develop texts for students and their parents? Although some educators prefer to avoid waking up a sleeping giant, the same perception of crisis must be aroused regarding drug abuse as was used to awaken the public to the importance of AIDS prevention (Asahi Evening news 15th May, 1996).

As observed by Fukui and Wada (1994), opportunities for drinking by minors are highly prevalent in Japanese society. According to their survey in 1990, strong relationships between smoking occasionally or daily and drinking alcohol with peers have been reported, even though both drinking alcohol and smoking under the age of 20 is prohibited in Japan and treated as juvenile delinquency. Adolescent alcohol consumption with the family in the evenings is sometimes seen in Japanese families and it is socially acceptable to a certain degree. In addition the (Suzuki et al., 1993) survey revealed that 19.8% teenagers drink at home with approval of parents and 50.9% respondents agree that they drink with peers. And 66% respondents agree that their families think that at their age it is all right to drink. These results further show that alcoholic beverages are very accessible to underage drinkers although the legal age for purchasing and drinking is 20 years. Specifically, drug abuse has crept into our schools while we were not paying attention (Asahi Evening news May 15, 1996). And normal innocent children are exposed to drug pushers before they could even understand right from wrong. Juvenile authorities interviewing young people at a shopping and entertainment district in Tokyo and Osaka found that 17% of respondents had been solicited by drug pushers. The figure is just one indication of the deep-rooted evil stalking the young (Asahi Evening News May 15, 1996).

Pharmaceutically, alcohol is a drug, it is a depressant or tranquilizer. Alcohol is pushed quite openly by the alcoholic beverage industry (Shimizu, 1992). In its role as a drug pusher, this industry actively seeks to cut down on the percentage of abstainers in the underage group and to increase annual percapita consumption among those who drink. The alcoholic beverage industry still does not publicly acknowledge the fact that it is merchandising a drug. Nor does it advertise the fact that abuse of its product is alcoholism, and that is the nation's great health problem. While the industry counts its profits, government capitalizes on the tax revenues that flow from Japanese drinking practices. In 1987, the alcohol attributable cost of medical care was estimated at Y 1,095.7 billion, representing 6.9% of the total national medical

expenditure. In addition, alcoholism and related problems cost the nation an estimated Y 6,637.5 billion representing 1.9% of the gross national product, in 1987, which was three times that of the national revenue from taxes on alcohol beverages (Nakamura et al., 1993).

(IV) SURVEYS ON ALCOHOL DRINKING BY THE YOUTHS

In the past 30 years, few provincial surveys and local surveys on Japanese youths were carried out. In 1993, Suzuki et al. survey on drinking by youths was carried out by utilizing Adolescents Alcohol Involvement scale (AAIS) it is a measure of overall alcohol use, assessing not only frequency and quantity of drinking but also exploring what means and from where alcohol is obtain by the adolescents. The same survey highlighted that there are various factors which promote alcohol use and abuse by the adolescents. In addition, Kono et al. (1977) reported that about half of Japanese young men (53.3%) and young women (44.1%) who are between the ages of 5 and 19 years, and therefore under the legal drinking age of 20 — consider themselves to be drinkers.

According to Matsushita et al. (1996) a large scale survey on use of alcohol and tobacco and the inhalation of paint thinner by Japanese high school students, a higher percentage of respondents reported past or regular use of these substances than in a 1978 survey. The 14,438 respondents (ages 15-18 years) represented 9 out of the 47 prefectures throughout Japan. 76% reported that they had consumed alcohol at some time, and 50% reported drinking on a regular basis. They found that a significant percentage of the alcohol drinkers also used tobacco or paint thinner. Further it was observed that there was a tendency toward polysubstance use among these high school students.

Other surveys in comparable urban areas (Horii et al., 1976, Tani et al., 1975, Tani et al., 1978) reported that more than 80% of the girls and 90% of the boys in their junior and senior high school sample have experienced drinking. In addition, many surveys have found that the frequency of drinking among youth is increasing and it has become a growing problem (Kuboushi et al, 1987).

In 1989, the alcohol manufacturing association carried out a survey on adolescent drinking, and showed that 54.2% drink alcohol regularly. The same association conducted a survey in 1992 and revealed that 64.7% of adolescents drink alcohol despite the law. It has increased almost 10% within a three year time interval. In addition, a 1992 survey shows that 51.9% male and 52.5% female junior high school students and 78.0% male and 74.7% female high school students drink alcohol. Another survey in 1993 on junior high school students show that 75.2% males and 73.2% females drink alcohol. In 1994, survey by Prime Ministers Office, Adolescent Division shows that 79% males and 78% female students drink alcohol (Shimizu, in press).

These studies were done in different years and many of them have different methodologies and different localities but the results shows an increasing trend of teenagers drinking in the Japanese society. Further, these findings show that special attention should be paid by school teachers and parents on adolescent drinking. These studies have found that male and female adolescents are equally likely to drink. However, males are much more likely to be heavy and frequent drinkers. For example, in the year 1993 survey by Suzuki et al. showed that 16.4% males and 9.5% females are problem drinkers. Further, same survey revealed that 21.4% males and 10.0% female high school students are heavy drinkers.

The amount of drinking differs somewhat by sex. More boys have taken 3-6 drinks when they drank. Significantly, 21.1% of boys and 10.2% of girls, admitted that they are drinking until 'high' and 'drunk' (Suzuki et al., 1993). Intoxication is a special problem for teenagers because their reactions to alcohol are complicated by their lack of experience in coping with its effects. In addition, the above results show that, increasing prevalence of heavy drinking among teenagers that frequently involves intoxication and therefore it is logical to speculate on the future implications of such drinking Fillmore (1974) based a preliminary 20 year follow-up study of men and women who participated in 'the college drinking survey' in the 1950's found that the 'early problem drinking' is significantly related to the later problem drinking during the 20 year period.

In addition, (Kuboshi et al., 1987) survey demonstrated the rise and the extent in frequency of drinking among youth and they conclude that it has become a growing problem in the Japanese society. They have found in their

survey, in 1987, 36.3% of the respondents were heavy drinkers. The gender breakdown of the aforementioned figure was 55.6% males and 37.1% female. Significantly, this survey data has shown that the majority of the high school students consume a large quantity of alcohol at a time. All the above survey results shows that where alcohol drinking is a concerned, minimum age legislation has been only symbolic official policy of abstention in Japan. Yet in reality adolescent behavior stands in contrast to, legal restrictions of alcohol use and it's considerably less influential in shaping adolescent behavior as a prevalent social norm. Peer modeling, youth culture and permissive drinking culture in Japan have been considered to be more influential in shaping the adolescent drinking behavior than Minimum drinking age legislation as a whole. It is argued that, all this sparring obey the minimum drinking age legislation misses the point altogether and data from various surveys revealed that young adolescents have been drinking in larger numbers, at earlier ages and with greater frequency due to the extent to which community and social environment facilitate underage drinking.

Traditionality Vs. Modernity

The percentage of drinkers who drink sake is directly correlated with age. In other words, young people prefer beer and whisky: older people prefer sake (Kono et al., 1977, Kono 1991, Suwaki, 1985, Kuboushi et al., 1987). These studies have found that beer was preferred by young men while older males tended to drink Japanese sake. Younger people in Japan mostly prefer beer, wine and shochu. One observation that should be made here, is that in modern Japan, shochu has been widely used for a cocktail. Cocktail had been discovered by Westerners and it has been more popular among the young Japanese (Mente, 1989). The low cost is another prominent contributing factor to the popularity of shochu. Beer has long been the lubrication of choice, far outpacing the traditional brew of Japanese sake. The reduction in import tariffs that came into effect recently has boosted the demand for imported liquors — scotch for business men, Bourbon for fashion — conscious young (Swinnerton, 1993). Young Japanese today drink beer and it may reasonably be expected that they will carry that preference into old age. Western beverages have shown a long term trend toward an expanded share

of a growing market and there is no reason to doubt that this trend will continue as today's young people age.

The use of alcohol by the adolescents and the probability of the number of abstainers will decrease and the number of uses increases when there is greater permissive norm prevalent in any society (a more negative value is related to abstaining). Moreover, according to the rapid economic development in Japan, students are better off economically and are consequently to a larger extent able to purchase alcohol due to the cheap price. Some alcoholic beverages are even cheaper than soft drinks such as can of a cola.

In sum, the social facts of popular attitudes and lack of behavioral alternatives of drinking etiquette and of larger cultural patterns, all conspire to make it exceedingly difficult for a man to be a teetotaler in Japan. Bernstein (1983) noted that drunkenness in Japan is an enjoyable and culturally desirable condition where one is permitted to indulge oneself and seek the indulgence of others. Immense toleration is shown for drunken behavior except for drunken driving in Japan. (Suwaki, 1995, Clifford, 1976, Reishaure, 1981, Desapriya and Iwase, in press, Matsushita et al., 1996) (Shimizu, in press, Suzuki et al., 1993, Kono, 1991, Higuchi and Kono, 1994, Kubouchi et al., 1987) claim that there has been a general increase of alcohol use among adolescents. In addition, these studies have indicated both increased levels of consumption, changes in traditional drinking patterns and expansion of the drinking population to groups including women and adolescents (Kono, 1991). Thus, the extent to which adolescents are indulging in alcohol and tobacco, can be regarded as indicating deviation from traditional social norms and change in the patterns of alcohol use.

(V)ALCOHOL RELATED TRAFFIC PROBLEMS AMONG TEENAGERS

Motor vehicle traffic accidents are a leading cause of death among children, adolescents and young adults between 5 and 24 years of age in Japan. The trend toward the frequent occurrence of traffic accidents due to drunk-driving is a universal fact especially in Japan more youths are involved in drunk-driving and related problems (Shimizu, 1991, Furumura, 1988,

Kobayashi et al., 1990). Thus the influence of this research has led to the conclusion that alcohol was one of the major causes which leads to traffic accidents among adolescents. Therefore, control of alcohol use by adolescents should be a major policy response by the government.

Apart from the above factors several studies have also shown the importance of alcohol in young drivers traffic accidents. It has also shown that alcohol is more dangerous for young drivers, as the risk of having an accident is reinforced by the combined above factors. Still another approach centers on skill, and development, and suggests that youthful crash involvement results from the simultaneous acquisition of both drinking and driving experience. Young people also have a low tolerance for alcohol. They are behaviorally impaired after a few drinks although their blood alcohol levels may not be very high. Several studies have suggested that personality factors such as aggressiveness, intolerance of authority, non-conformity, and positive attitude toward alcohol may be associated with an increased probability of driving after drinking. A few studies have focused on developmental issues and the stress of transition from adolescent to adulthood.

In 1994, 11,494 teens were convicted for Driving under alcohol influence and 75 teens were convicted for Driving while impaired (traffic statistics, National Police Agency, 1994). Hence it would appear that many adolescents who drive after drinking are likely to be a social rebels who ignore both traffic laws as well as alcohol beverage control laws. The problem of young drivers is well known and several factors contribute to the explanation of their high accident risk. These factors could structure as high risk taking behavior among youths, level of actual knowledge and skill and lack of driving experience and level of personal development and maturity. The Association for selling alcohol through vending machines will replace all alcohol vending machines with new models that require ID cards which carry names and birth dates, by May 2000, the Japanese association of alcoholic beverage retailers reported (Japan Times, Friday 19th, April, 1995). The association adopted the scheme at its general meeting held in Sapporo, in an effort to meet mounting appeals from the public for abolition of the machines used at present and growing number of minors have been blamed for alcohol related traffic accidents.

The hope is that by introducing ID cards to vending machines, the teenagers will find it difficult to obtain alcoholic beverages through vending machines in the year 2000. Anyway, this move to introduce ID cards to buy alcohol beverage through vending machines in year 2000 may mark another period, a 4 year period left for teenagers to buy alcohol without any restrictions. One rationale for such measure delayed until year 2000 is that alcohol becomes readily available to minors for another four years, as a result of lack of enforcement, on the part of selling alcohol by a senseless machine. Accordingly it could be hypothesized that we could wait another four years to prevent drunken driving related problems by the teenagers. By ignoring the fact that commodity regulation of alcohol is a public health issue, Japanese society may lapse into another 4 years of delusionary contentment, while the alcohol problem continues to drain the health and economic resources of the nation without a restructuring of health priorities of alcohol regulation.

According to a recent survey in Japan, there are 11~17% problem drinkers among youths. Tsukue (1991) cited that according to unpublished report of a liquor company and revealed that 44.6% youths have the first experience of drinking by the time of entrance into junior high schools and 81.6% do so by entrance into senior high schools. 52.5% persons first drink in their homes and especially of liquor provided by their parents. Research indicated that early drinkers are at higher risk of later addiction or other alcohol problems (Robins, 1978, Gonzalez, 1989, Kuriyama et al., 1984, Yokoyama et al., 1969) in this context, raising the drinking age to 20 may not simply delay the occurrence of alcohol problem until a later age, rather these problems seem to be permanently averted.

Not only had the vast majority of students tried alcohol but had some problems with drinking. Despite the existence of a law which prohibits persons under 20 years old from drinking, results of many surveys have shown that more than half of junior high school students and the majority of high school students (Kono, 1991). In addition Tsukue (1991) Shimizu (in press), and Fukui and Wada (1994), further observed that in Japan minors are not compelled to observe the legislation and so they have drinking problem behavior and are involved in smoking and delinquency. Suzuki et al. (1993) found that, 82% of young people are current drinkers and 12.7% are problem drinkers. Further 15.3% were regular heavy drinkers. On a survey performed

9 years previously with the same instrument this figure was only 1.3% (Suzuki et al., 1981, Higuchi and Kono, 1994). Approximately 10-fold difference in the rate of problem drinkers suggest that alcohol related problems are increasing among teenagers.

(VI)ALCOHOL DRINKING BY YOUTHS VS. MINORS ALCOHOL PROHIBITION LAW

Prominent contemporary alcohol Sociologist, Room (1976) observed that normative conflict or lack of integration which includes conflict or discrepancy between ideal cultural norms and actual drinking behavior. Cultural lag between older proscriptive norms and current drinking behavior, conflict in the legal system between rules that restricting behavior and policies promoting and encouraging drinking and conflict between asceticism and hedonism.

The confusion and conflict about drinking by teenagers in the Japanese society has been compounded by the inconsistencies between the actual behavior and the applicable laws. It has been observed that in Japanese society adolescents drinking behavior is reinforced by the approval of the behavior pattern by both the family and the reference group. It is known that people learn in interaction with society in their lives to evaluative definitions (norms, values, attitudes, orientations) of the behavior, as good or bad. The prevalence norm and the attitudes, in the society with regard to drinking is observed to be over-permissive with a prevalence of a drinking norm, which one might expect to reinforce the drinking behavior of the adolescents.

In Japan, the law on one hand restricts adolescent drinking while on the other hand the mass media promotes teenage drinking by effective ways and means. Beer advertising is so pervasive in Japanese society that children are unlikely to be able to avoid it. Television advertising campaigns have been displaying alcohol , as not only socially acceptable but as a desirable means to gain social success and sexual desirability. These are two key elements for adolescents in achieving adulthood. Massive advertisement appeals have contributed to the potent message to adolescents who are expected to experiment with adult behavior. It is understood that all alcohol related commercial advertisement's main aim is to be persuasive and not educative.

For example, alcohol advertising represents drinking as a 'safe yet exciting practice de-emphasizing the potential health risks' and other potentially negative consequences of alcohol abuse by adolescents. Further, these messages are repetitive which 'legitimizes' and 'normalizes' drinking as a socially acceptable activity.

Further, these advertisements portray a generally appealing picture of the effect of using alcohol and associated alcohol use with positive imagery popular heroes, fun activities and affluent or fashionable life styles. The teenagers are particularly susceptible to such messages and associations which affect the formation of attitudes and beliefs about alcohol during childhood. And in this commercial environment, is there any practical meaning of writing in small letters that 'beer should be drunk only after turning to the age of 20' on the beer cans and underneath the commercials itself. Awareness of advertising causes children to be more favorably predisposed to alcohol and drinking. Drinking as well as smoking is considered by Japanese adolescents as an attractive symbol of life. The law prohibits those younger than 20 years from drinking and smoking. Although the law is not obeyed and moreover some parents are indifferent to drinking by their children, although drinking is generally thought to be one of the indices of juvenile delinquency (Ando and Hagesawa, 1970).

Social attitudes towards the adolescent drinking Prohibition Law

It is often said, but not documented that Japanese society is tolerant of public inebriety. Thus police in Japan may be less willing to enforce a law, against a drunkards, than would they in the United States (Izuno et al., 1992). We should also note at this point that in Japanese criminal law, according to Hirano, "punishment is rarely inflicted unless serious harm has actually been caused to society....." Moreover acts that are rather widely punished in the United States such as sexual crimes and gambling (victimless crimes), either fall out side the bounds of criminality in Japan or laws concerning them are loosely enforced. Further alcohol remains readily available to youths because of lack of enforcement of the minimum drinking age law. Even 1993, Suzuki's survey found that 46.7% of minors had been buying alcohol from vending machines, super market and liquor shops. And the same survey found that most parents (66%) give approval for underage drinking. Parents

are prohibited by the legislation to provide alcohol to teenagers, no parents so far face consequences from doing so. In addition, so called minors alcohol prohibition law have statutes prohibiting selling alcohol to individuals under 20 years of age, few people face consequences for doing so. Statistics showed that very few actions were taken against commercial institutions for providing alcohol to teenagers, despite results of the above surveys indicate that a majority of alcohol outlets sell alcohol.

In spite of the increased research findings which revealed the nature of the existing problem, there is as yet no consistent social response to this problem. Many discriminatory or ineffective policies prevail in this context and the social response for this is yet to be focused. A very few social scientists and medical experts are inclined to exaggerate the problem while others deny that it even exists. Higuchi and Kono (1994), Higuchi (1991), Suwaki (1995), Ohashi, K. (1980), and Japan Times (Nov. 18th, 1994) observed that as long as society as a whole takes a tolerant attitude toward drinking, the drinking problems of individuals will continue to be tolerated by those around them, and the problem will not be faced until it becomes rather serious. Naturally in such a social environment, those with drinking problems are not likely to be known as serious problems. And drinking norms in Japan result in delayed identification of alcohol related problems. In short, rules and regulations might be an effective control mechanism when those structures reflect cultural norms and social values. However, it is true that rules and regulations are not effective unless they otherwise reflect cultural norms and social values. It seems that people do not consider underage drinking to be a serious offense, as it is a victimless crime and, specially, if no teenager is involved in drunk driving or in any other socially undesirable act. Therefore enforcement of minimum drinking age law is not supported by the prevailing social norm.

Discussion

This points to the need to understand the psychological social and economic factors that affect a person's decision to use or to continue using alcohol. The availability of alcoholic beverages has increased in Japan over the past several years. Alcoholic beverage are available not only from the usual sources, e.g.. liquor stores, but a variety of alcoholic beverage can now

be obtain easily from the vending machines (Kono, 1991, Suwaki, 1995, Shimizu, 1992, and Shimizu, in press) revealed that nearly 200000 vending machines of this kind are located throughout Japan. Anybody including teenagers can purchase alcoholic beverages, especially beer and sake without any restriction and control (Suzuki, 1993, Kono, 1991, Suwaki, 1995). In addition with rapid industrialization percapita annual income has dramatically increased as a result, the relative cost of alcoholic beverage has constantly decreased (Desapriya and Iwase, in press, Kono, 1991, Moore, 1961). This increased availability affects both the usual consumers (i.e. male adults) and those who do not traditionally consume alcohol in Japan i.e. females and especially youths. (Kono, 1991) This new trend which suggests that women and young people now constitute a significant proportion of the alcohol market.

Cheap alcohol products, more affordable and easy access to alcohol by minors would have contributed to develop incidence of alcohol addiction among teenagers. It could be observed that price has been stable or decreased for years and on the other hand the availability has been increased tremendously. Many prices have been coming down from around 1992. Consumer prices fell by 6% between 1992 and 1993 based on the consumer price index as calculated by the Seiyu Super Market chain on the basis of the prices of daily necessities sold in its stores (The Japan Times, November 20, 1995) We must admit that in Japan the economy has basically been given political priority, over other areas, and health and welfare policies have rather followed economic ones. Availability of alcohol is virtually unlimited with easy access, especially to adolescents and price is very low due to a strong Japanese currency. Thus Japan must be the country with the easiest access to alcoholic drinks (Suwaki, 1995).

A number of econometric studies examine the price responsiveness of youth alcohol consumption and related outcomes. Grossman et al. (1987) and Coate and Grossman (1988), Laixuthai and Chaloupka (1993) found that the frequency of the youth drinking is sensitive to alcohol prices. Their results shows that a tax increase least to larger reductions in drinking among youths who are frequent and fairly frequent drinkers than among those who are infrequent drinkers. This finding should not be understated because frequent and fairly frequent drinkers are likely to cause motor vehicle crashes and

deaths. For a youth, the full "price" of consuming alcohol is the sum of both money price and the indirect costs of illegal drinking, more specifically an individual when deciding whether to commit crime will weigh up the costs and benefits of doing so. Whether or not the crime is committed will therefore depend upon the relative magnitude of the crime's benefits and costs to the individual concerned. The costs of illegal activity could be enhanced by strict enforcement of the law and increasing overall punishment to the act. This approach could be implemented by increasing penalties and fines, to those persons who violate the law.

Moreover, a recent study by Kenkel (1993) indicates that an increase in revenue due to a higher alcohol tax partially off-sets the loss in consumer surplus that results from the tax increase, while there is nothing to offset the loss in consumer surplus that results from the drinking age policy approach. Especially it is understood that enforcement and administrative costs associated with a minimum drinking age law is higher than, those associated with changes in tax increase policy. In addition, underage drinking prohibition law can easily be disobeyed (for example by using fake identification or obtaining alcohol from parents), in this sense excise tax hikes are much more difficult to evade. It is found that the real value of alcohol products is well below the level of early 1960s (Kono, 1991). One might expect young people to be more sensitive to price changes since they have had less previous exposure to alcohol and therefore have less rigid drinking habits. As many research found alcohol beverages appear to behave on the market like other commodities, and changes in alcohol prices and consumer income appear to be closely related to observable changes in alcohol consumption. It is possible that through these strategies and increasingly proactive stance of the public and policy makers and law enforcement agencies could contribute to reductions in alcohol related problems not only among teenagers but also to the entire population. Accordingly, it could be argued that effective alcohol policies responsibility is a crucial determinant for individual capacity for controlling use. And this is why it is universally accepted that social and economic policies shape, control and modify the individual behavior through regulations on alcohol use.

Health education has the advantage of being able to control the risk factors involved in developing alcohol abuse and can facilitate a better

understanding of both alcohol related problems and responsible drinking patterns of the youth. It would appear that alternative measures such as health promotion and concerns about harmful effects can influence choices about alcohol taking. As variety of researchers have proposed policy modifications which restrict alcohol availability by various methods (Suwaki 1995, Shimizu 1992), and it would no doubt increase the deterrent effects of underage drinking Prohibition law. One of the current law's major problems is its treatment of underage drinkers as delinquents, when they are not believed by the vast majority of public to warrant this designation, mainly due to drinking being highly permissive in this society.

Conclusions

Minors alcohol prohibition law either do not have an impact on the use of alcohol and the problems etc. and the problems associated with its use by the teenagers, or is not being enforced to control alcohol abuse by the adolescents. Alcohol use by the adolescents is not considered as a serious offense by the society, hence enforcement of minimum drinking age legislation is not supported by the prevalent social norms. In other words, in Japan minimum purchase and drinking age law has not been effective in reducing alcohol consumption and problems among young people. The strategy is found to be culturally contradictory to prevailing drinking norms in the society. This observation indicate that minimum drinking age legislation is not effective but rather that other alcohol control strategies may be more effective in Japan. Among others, such other controls may include, excise tax increase and restricting availability of alcohol products which could prevent teenagers early unhealthy drinking practices.

Alcohol related problems of the youths are increasing, due to the fact that policies which are aimed at controlling them are not effective. The failure of adolescent drinking prohibition law can explained in part by the societal acceptance of alcohol generally and the relative disinterest in controlling its legal use. Relaxing of alcohol related regulations further in 1994 has been accomplished to increase the availability of alcohol. The Japanese economy has witnessed a radical process of liberalization since the mid 1990's. Many sectors which had previously been under direct government control are now regulated by the competitive market place. One key issue in the de-regulation

of Japan's liquor legislation has been the extent to which alcohol should be freely available in entire society. While there is conclusive evidence to point to a link between the levels of alcohol consumption and the number of alcohol related problems, deregulation of the alcohol industry would be expected to further growth as policy makers are under great pressure to liberalize the market internationally as well as locally.

By raising the drinking age, legislators have expected to limit and reduce teenage alcohol abuse. Yet it seems that this ultimate goal couldn't be attained as there are discrepancies and loopholes in the alcohol policy itself, such as alcohol being available through vending machines. Minimum drinking age laws alone cannot adequately prevent underage youth from obtaining alcohol since youth get alcohol from vending machines and from parents and friends as well as establishments that sell alcohol to youth despite the law. In this context it could be argued that enlightenment and education of the teenagers concerning alcohol and an increase in taxation may be more effective in controlling alcohol abuse by youths. The widely available international literature on this subject suggests that the price policy (depending in the size of tax increase) is more effective in preventing youth alcohol abuse. Therefore, it could be argued that policies to curtail youth alcohol abuse by raising the real price of alcohol may have a very favorable cost benefit ratio since they involved less monetary cost when compared to law enforcement costs. An increased in excise tax policy seems to be more desirable approach, since the administrative and enforcement costs associated with a tax increase policy are smaller and are compensated by the additional tax revenue generated. Yet, relative effectiveness of any such tax increases on alcohol consumption further depends on the level of tax increase and the nature and extent of changes in other alcohol policies such as restriction of availability.

Therefore if reductions in frequent and fairly frequent youth alcohol abuse is a policy goal, this research suggests that a substantial increase in alcoholic beverage taxes and restriction of availability of alcohol are potentially most effective policies to achieve that goal. Assuming that these two policies are to be considered for implementation neither can be done without difficulties. Implementation of any tax increase and availability restrictions will have to overcome many obstacles; such as public opinion and

the alcoholic beverage industry. To overcome these problems their opinion must be shaped so that the higher taxes are viewed as a tool to prevent alcohol related problems, not merely another source of government revenue.

It is evident that normative acceptance of drinking by Japanese drinking culture contributes to youth alcohol consumption and this has been reinforced by the alcohol availability in various means to the adolescents and significantly this behavior is generally acceptable and society does not view underage drinking behavior as delinquent even though it is against the law.

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