



2023  
**TREND  
SURVEY  
ON ALCOHOL**

Annual Trend Survey on  
Alcohol Consumption in  
Sri Lanka



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# TREND SURVEY ON ALCOHOL

Annual Trend Survey on Alcohol Consumption  
in Sri Lanka - 2023

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# Executive Summary

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The Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC), Sri Lanka has been conducting trend surveys on alcohol consumption annually since 1998. The trend survey analysis (also known as the SPOT Survey) is conducted under the main aim of mapping and tracing current trends of alcohol consumption across Sri Lanka. This report presents the findings of the trend survey for the year 2023 which was aimed at determining trends of alcohol consumption across the country, thereby assisting policymakers and relevant stakeholders in formulating effective alcohol policies that aid alcohol reduction and prevention.

Data was collected through a survey administered among the population of males above 15 years of age across five selected districts in Sri Lanka, namely, Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy, Kurunegala and Jaffna. Data analysis and results on alcohol consumption patterns were formulated based on 1210 valid responses obtained from the survey participants. From this survey population, 30.6% (n=370) were current consumers.

The sample was divided into three age groups for analysis, namely, 15-24 years, 25-39 years and 40 years and above. The majority of current consumers reported that they consumed alcohol on a monthly basis. The highest alcohol consumption rates on a daily and weekly basis were reported from the age category 40 years and above, which was consistent with previous trend surveys.

When considering the district-wise comparison, Colombo reported the highest alcohol consumption rate (35.8%), while Jaffna reported the lowest (21.4%). Beer and arrack were the most prominently consumed alcohol products among the majority of the current consumers. Toddy, kasippu and other alcohol products showed low consumption rates among the current consumers. Initiation of alcohol use has occurred mostly during the age 18-20 years (40.3%). The most common type of alcohol product consumed at initiation was beer (52.6%). The survey revealed that a significant number of current alcohol consumers reported their initiation occurred at big matches (35.6%), particularly at leading schools where large gatherings of students occur. It is the current trend, where these events often feature alcohol stalls managed by alumni, serving as a strategic promotion by the alcohol industry to target vulnerable school-aged children. Therefore, the survey highlights the fact that this situation requires careful attention and action from schools and educational authorities.

From the survey participants, 19.9% had been successful in quitting alcohol consumption at the time of administering the survey. The reasons for quitting alcohol use were different among the three age groups. Perceiving alcohol use as a purposeless behavior and health concerns were the two most common factors for quitting, while financial constraints were also reported as a prominent factor. To build on this positive trend, it is essential to further disseminate knowledge about the health, social, and economic impacts of alcohol use, encouraging more individuals to quit the habit. Furthermore, a notable 22.0% of the survey participants between 15-21 years of age were identified to be current consumers, highlighting a concerning prevalence of alcohol sales to underaged individuals in the country despite legal prohibitions. This finding underscores the importance of addressing this issue effectively.

Therefore, the survey findings emphasize the need for further awareness among communities, especially vulnerable populations, alcohol taxation, pricing policies and effective alcohol prevention

strategies to reduce alcohol initiations and overall alcohol use in the country. The survey also provides a platform for further discussions on the importance of delaying or preventing initiation and banning sales of alcohol products for underage persons.

# 1. Introduction

---

Alcohol consumption poses a significant global health risk, contributing to over 200 diseases and injuries and resulting in approximately 3 million deaths annually, representing 5.3% of all deaths.<sup>1</sup> Its detrimental effects extend beyond the individual alcohol user to include societal impacts such as violence and road accidents. These consequences impose substantial economic burdens on countries, estimated to range from 2.1% to 2.5% of their Gross Domestic Product in middle and high-income countries respectively.<sup>2</sup> This emphasizes the need to implement effective alcohol control policies. Alcohol control policies encompass regulatory measures designed to mitigate the negative public health impacts associated with alcohol consumption. These policies are multifaceted, targeting various aspects such as pricing, availability, advertising, and taxation to influence patterns of consumption. At their core, alcohol policies aim to reduce the societal and individual harms linked to alcohol use, including but not limited to, alcohol-related diseases, injuries, and social consequences, while increasing the revenue of governments, which is a win-win situation for nations.

Considering this situation, successive governments have taken several steps to control the prevalence of alcohol in the country. For instance, the National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol (NATA) was established in 2006 to enact strong legal aspects for prevention activities in Sri Lanka. Some of the measures taken to control alcohol use include prohibition of the sale of any alcohol product to persons under twenty-one years of age, prohibition on installation of vending machines for dispensing alcohol products, prohibition of alcohol advertisements and sponsorships, as well as the free distribution of alcohol products. Sri Lanka's commitment to reduce alcohol consumption has resulted in a decreasing trend in alcohol consumption, as identified through the previous trend surveys done by ADIC. However, there is still a considerable percentage of current alcohol consumers, and there is an increasing trend of alcohol initiation and use among the youth between 15-21 years of age, even though laws are enacted to prohibit the sale of such products for this particular age group.

Under such circumstances, increasing the alcohol taxes according to a scientific framework can be identified as an important step in minimizing and preventing alcohol consumption in Sri Lanka, and reducing the economic, health and social harms associated with alcohol use. The 34% increase in excise duty for alcohol products, which was enacted as a policy decision by the Sri Lankan government in 2023, has already resulted in positive benefits which can be perceived. However, in order to ensure the sustainability of the positive effects of tax increases, there needs to be a systematic framework for alcohol tax indexation, to increase the alcohol taxes annually based on the inflation rate and economic growth in the country.

Therefore, the year 2023 alcohol trend survey findings put emphasis on the need to implement and facilitate necessary policy initiatives including indexation for alcohol products, awareness programmes and community interventions in order to counter the marketing strategies of the alcohol industry, as well as empower people to identify the harm and negative impact of alcohol consumption for their own well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/alcohol>

<sup>2</sup> WHO technical manual on alcohol tax policy and administration, 2023



## 1.1 Objectives

- To determine different trends of alcohol use within the country in terms of different products, age groups and districts.
- To analyse the trends of alcohol use and compare the results with surveys conducted in previous years.
- To identify the underlying attitudes and reasons for alcohol use among different age groups and districts.
- To determine the age of initiating alcohol use.

## 2. Methodology

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### 2.1 Survey design and setting

The trend survey was conducted as a cross-sectional study, which spanned across five districts in Sri Lanka, namely, Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy, Kurunegala and Jaffna in the year 2023, due to financial constraints faced as a consequence of the severe economic challenges in the country. The selected survey locations incorporated urban and rural populations as well as all ethnicities living in the country.

### 2.2 Survey population

The male population of 15 years of age and above living in the selected districts in Sri Lanka were included in the survey. Nonconsenting participants and participants with hearing or speech impairment were excluded from the survey.

### 2.3 Sample size and sampling

The total sample size used for the trend survey was 1340 survey participants from all five districts. The trend survey participants were recruited using a multi-stage sample design, that incorporated stratified and systematic sampling methods.

In the next stage of sampling, age was divided into three sub-groups as 15-24 years, 25-39 years, and 40 years and above, to obtain a representative sample of males above 15 years. Since it was found from the previous surveys that the first two age groups have lower usage, it was purposively oversampled. Therefore, the planned sample allocation for the chosen age groups were 40%, 40% and 20% respectively. This was determined based on population figures from the census and statistics. However exact sample size might have had slight variations during the survey.

### 2.4 Data collection and analysis

Trend survey data were collected by trained interviewers using a validated questionnaire, in September 2023. The ADIC trend survey is a unique survey that approaches participants in public places of the selected districts. This is to ensure high coverage of males who have a tendency to use alcohol, so that results will not be an underestimate of actual alcohol consumption rates in the country. The questionnaire was prepared in both native (Sinhala and Tamil) languages and was administered in the field according to the language preference of the survey participants. The first few questions were developed for gathering demographic information of the participants. Few questions were reserved for the contemporary issues directly affecting alcohol use. The rest of them were composite questions which were developed to obtain information regarding alcohol consumption

patterns. Data collected by the survey was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and figures that represent trends were compiled using Microsoft Excel.

Trends of alcohol use were analysed in different aspects and the following terminologies were defined and used for this purpose. Three groups, namely, current consumers, last 30-day abstainers and lifetime abstainers were identified. **'Current consumers'** were defined as individuals who have consumed alcohol within the past 30 days at the time the survey was administered, while **'Last 30-day abstainers'** were individuals who had consumed alcohol all long, however, have abstained during the past 30 days at the time of the survey. Individuals who have never consumed alcohol in their lifetime were referred to as **'lifetime abstainers'**. Apart from initiation and cessation, the rest of the survey results were obtained based on the responses of current consumers. Key analysis of this report is based on the valid responses of current consumers.

## 3. Results

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### 3.1 Geographical distribution of the survey participants

A total of 1340 responses from males aged 15 years and above were received for the trend survey. However, the response rate for each question may vary from the overall sample. A summary of the status of responses from all five districts is stated below.

*Table 1: Geographical distribution of the survey participants*

District	Province	Age group			Total
		15-24 years	25-39 years	40 years and above	
Colombo	Western	97 21.8%	107 20.0%	61 16.9%	265 19.8%
Gampaha	Western	102 23.0%	116 21.7%	78 21.5%	296 22.1%
Kandy	Central	101 22.7%	96 18.0%	63 17.4%	260 19.4%
Kurunegala	North-Western	87 19.6%	116 21.7%	64 17.7%	267 19.9%
Jaffna	Northern	57 12.8%	99 18.5%	96 26.5%	252 18.8%
Total		444 33.1%	534 39.9%	362 27.0%	1340 100.0%

### 3.2 Demographic Information of the survey participants

This section consists of the demographic information of the survey participants. It represents the distribution of the participants based on the age categories, level of education and occupational sector.

### 3.2.1 Age category of the survey participants

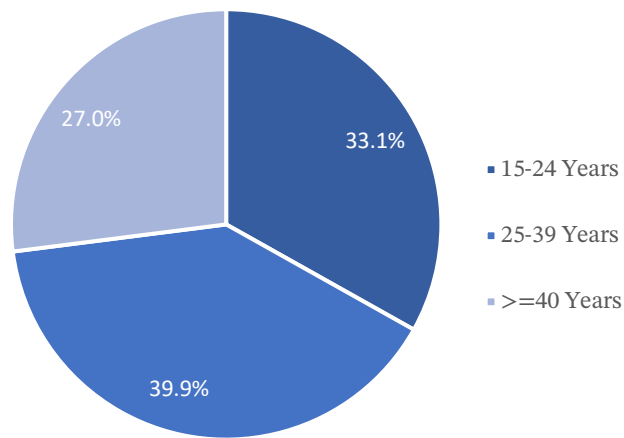


Figure 1: Age category of the survey participants

From the survey participants, the majority (39.9%) belonged to the age group 25-39 years. Furthermore, 33.1% were in the age group 15-24 years and 27% were in the age group 40 years and above. These figures showed a slight deviation from the initially allocated figures, as expected.

### 3.2.2 Education level of the survey participants

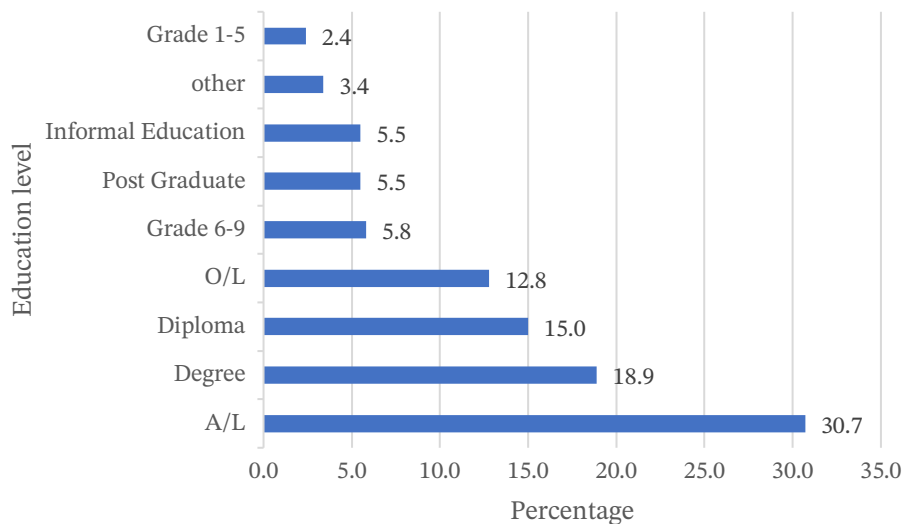


Figure 2: Education level of the survey participants

The survey participants belonged to various education levels. The highest percentage of participants (30.7%) had completed G.C.E. Advanced Level (A/L), while the second highest percentage (18.9%)

were degree holders. A minority consisting of 2.4% of the survey participants have only completed their primary education (grade 1-5).

### 3.2.3 Occupation sector of the survey participants

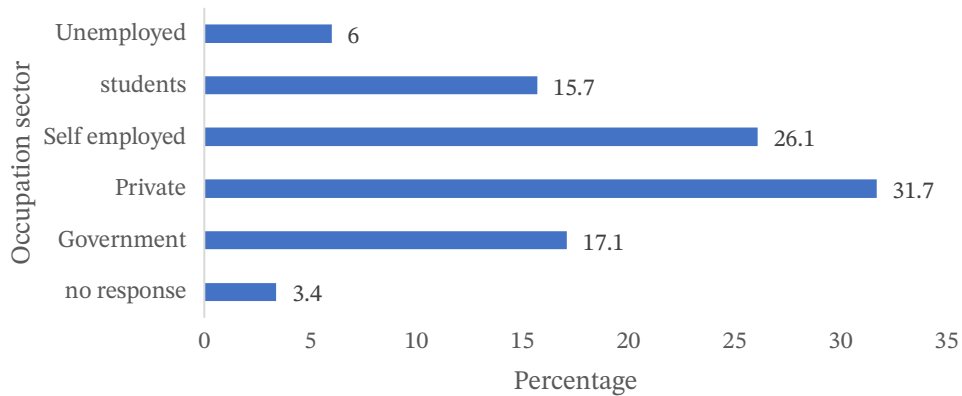


Figure 3: Occupation sector of the survey participants

The highest percentage of the survey participants were employed in the private sector (32.0%), while the second highest percentage were self-employed (26.0%). From the participants, 17.0% were in the government sector, 16.0% were students and 6.0% were unemployed.

### 3.3 Results obtained from the survey

#### 3.3.1 Status of alcohol consumption among the survey participants

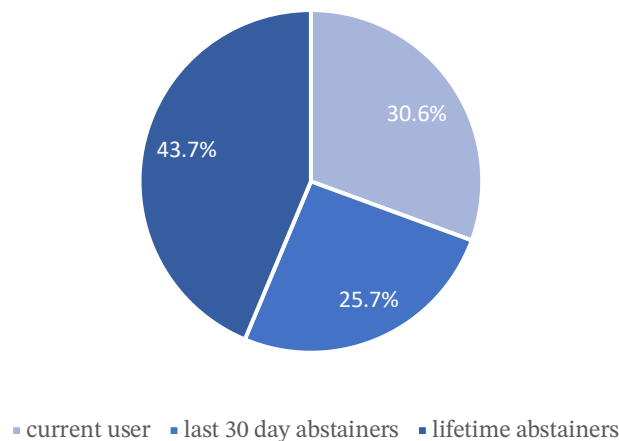


Figure 4: Status of alcohol consumption

According to the findings of the survey, majority of the survey participants were lifetime abstainers (43.7%). Furthermore, 30.6% of the participants were current consumers, while 25.7% had reported that they had not consumed alcohol during the last 30 days at the time of the survey.

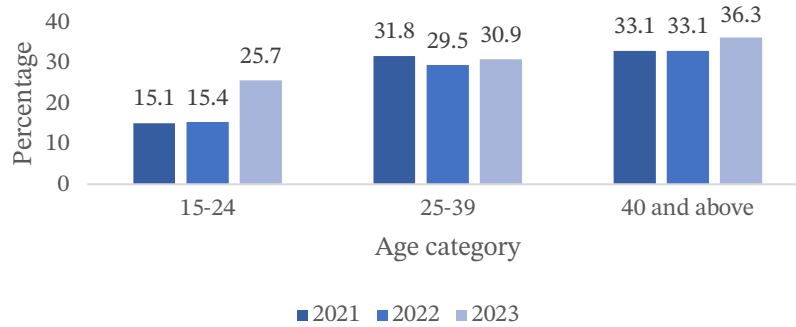


Figure 5: Comparison of alcohol use within the 3 age groups in the last 3 years

The above figure shows a comparison of the consumption of alcohol in the years 2021, 2022 and 2023. Alcohol consumption in all three age groups has increased within the period of three years.

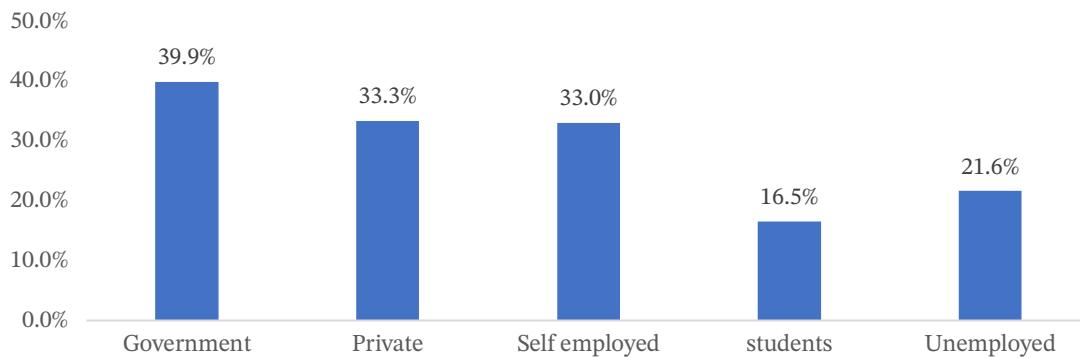


Figure 6: Alcohol consumption among survey participants in different occupational sectors

The highest alcohol use was reported by the survey participants working in the government sector (39.9%), while students reported the lowest alcohol consumption rate (16.5%).

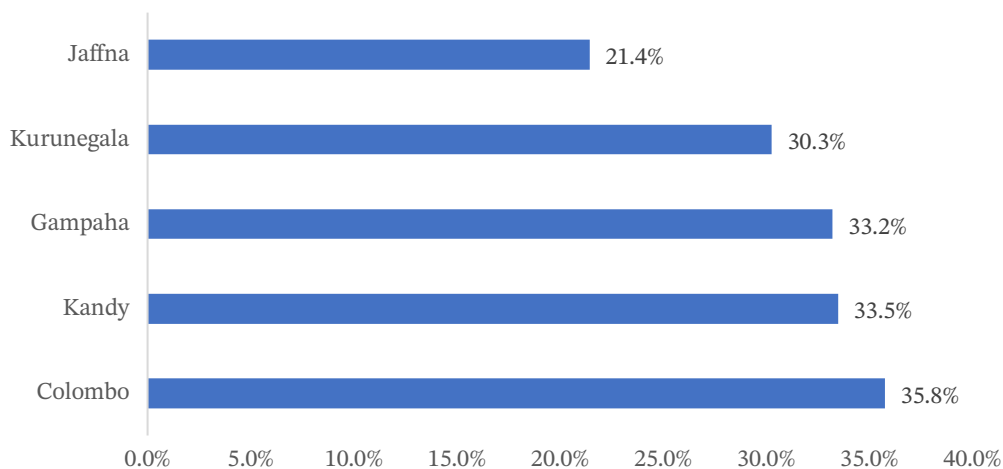


Figure 7: Status of alcohol consumption in the selected districts

When considering the districts included in the survey, the highest percentage of alcohol users was reported from Colombo district (35.8%) while the second highest percentage was observed in Kandy district (33.5%). The lowest number of alcohol users was observed in Jaffna (21.4%) district.

### 3.3.2 Frequency of alcohol use among the survey participants

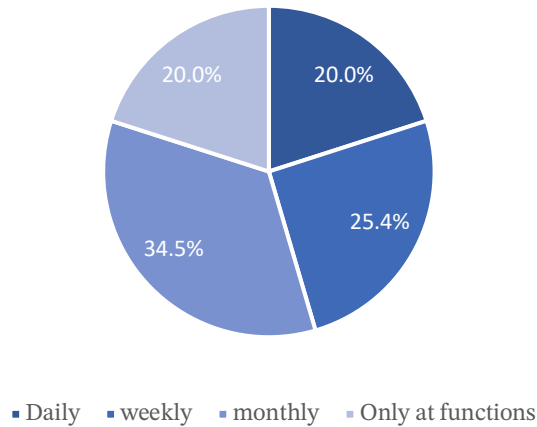


Figure 8: Frequency of alcohol consumption among current consumers

It was observed that the majority of current consumers were monthly alcohol users (34.5%), while daily alcohol users and individuals who consumed alcohol only in functions amounted to 20% each. From the current consumers, 25.4% reported that they consumed alcohol weekly.

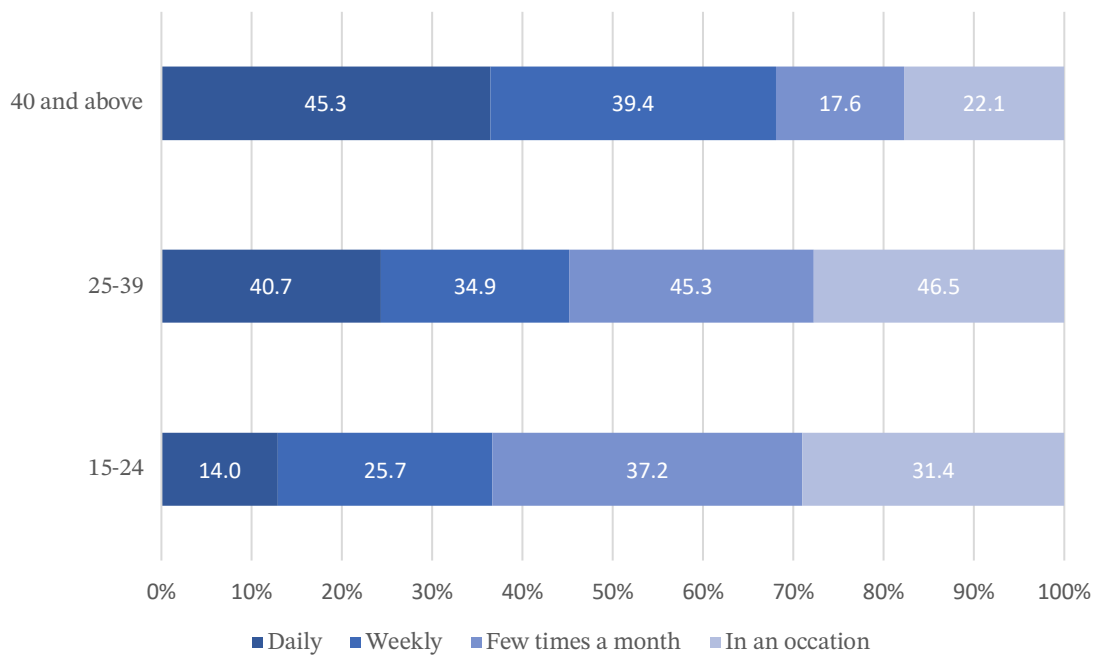
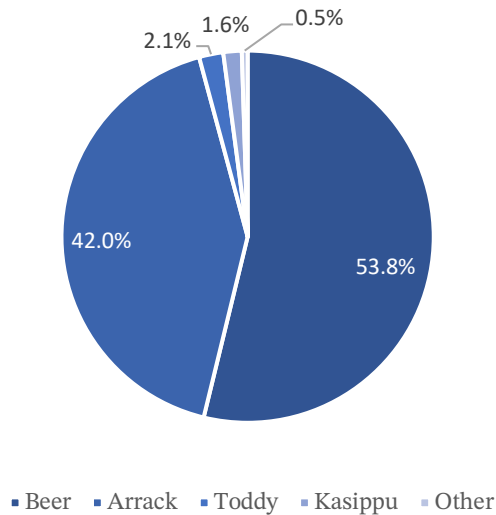


Figure 9: Frequency of alcohol consumption within the age categories



Daily alcohol use was highest in the age category 40 years and above (45.3%), while the current consumers in the age category 15-24 years reported the lowest daily alcohol consumption rate (14.0%). Similar percentages of current consumers in the age category 25-39 years consumed alcohol a few times a month (45.3%) and in certain occasions (46.5%).

### 3.3.3 Types of alcohol products consumed



Beer is the most popular type of alcohol product. Among the current consumers, more than half of the survey participants have reported the commonly consumed alcohol product as Beer (53.8%). The second most popular product is Arrack (42.0%), while only 2.1% of users consume Toddy. Very few percentages have reported the use of other alcohol products such as Kasippu (1.6%), which was not specified in detail as the consumption rate is very low

Figure 10: Types of alcohol products consumed by all current consumers

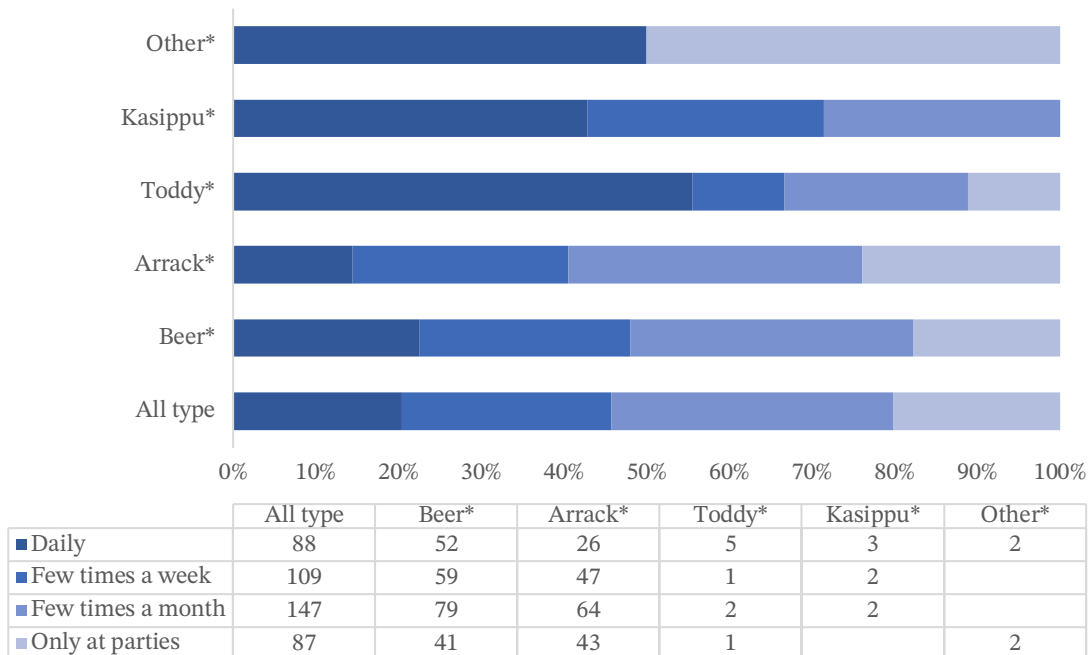


Figure 11: Frequencies of consuming different alcohol products

The above figure is an indication of how often different alcohol products are consumed by the current consumers. Kasippu and Toddy were mostly reported to be consumed daily, while Beer and Arrack were mostly consumed few times a month. Among these types, Toddy showed the highest daily consumption rate, while Arrack was reported to have the lowest daily consumption rate.

### 3.3.4 Alcohol initiation

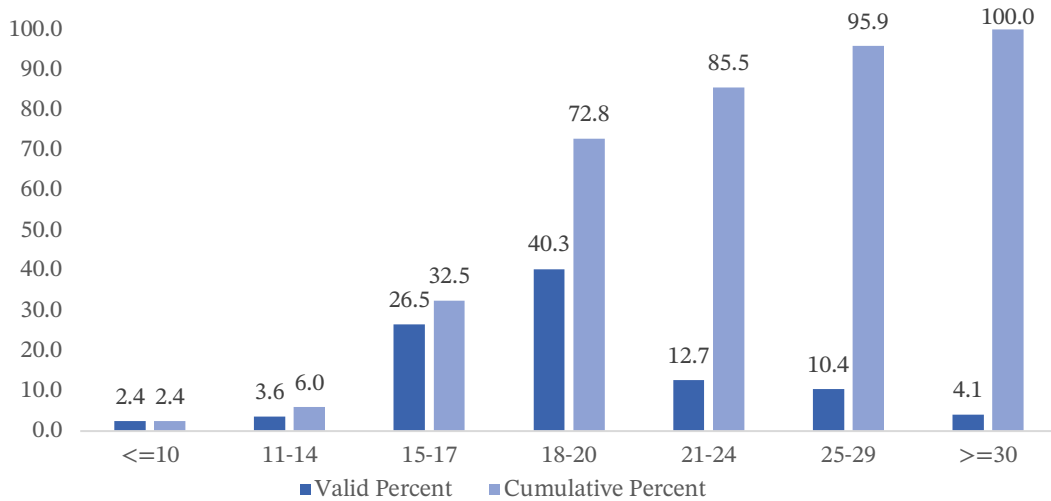


Figure 12: Alcohol initiation age

The highest percentage of initiations (40.3%) was reported at the age range of 18-20 years.

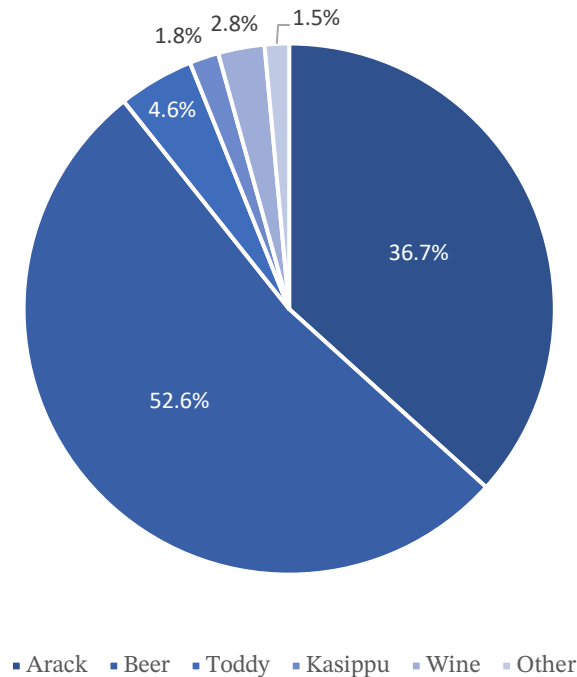


Figure 13: Type of alcohol product consumed at initiation

At the time of initiation, the highest percentage of users (52.6%) had used beer, while the second highest percentage of users (36.7%) had used arrack. Consumption of Toddy, Kasippu and other alcohol products is comparatively low.

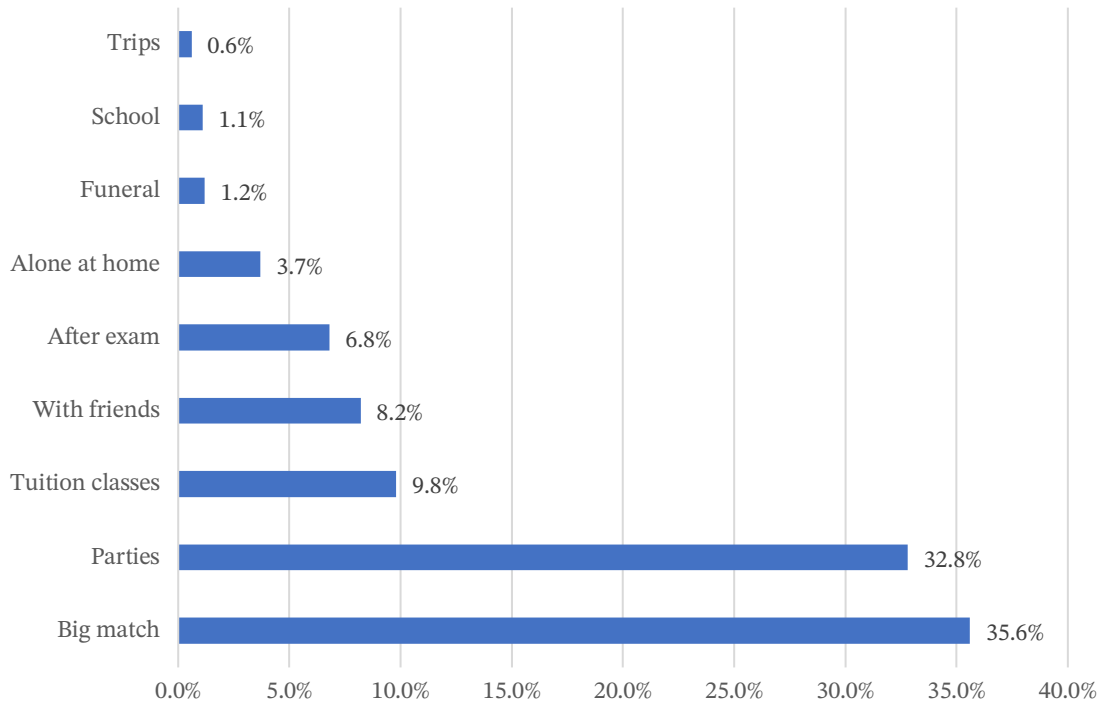


Figure 14: Alcohol initiation occasion

The highest percentage of survey participants (35.6%) has reported that initiation of alcohol use occurred at big matches, while several other reasons were given by other users. Parties was another common occasion (32.8%) which caused onset of alcohol use among the survey participants.

### 3.3.4 Cessation of alcohol use

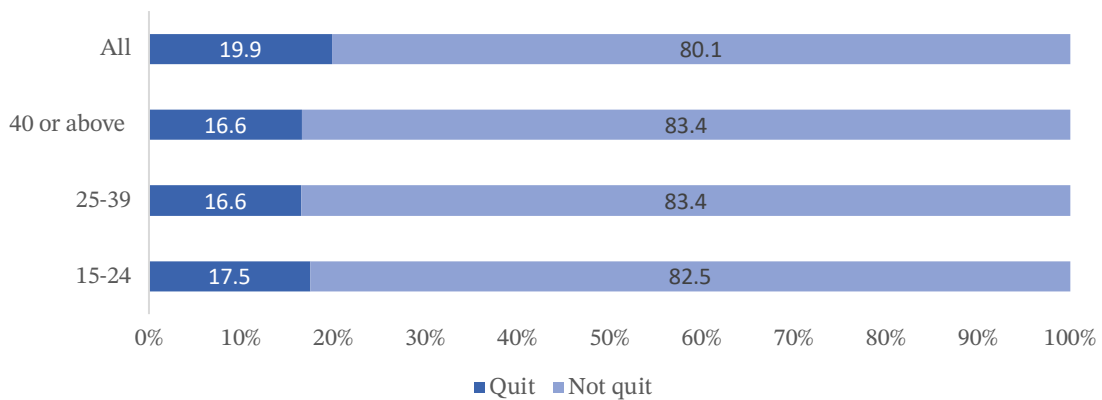


Figure 15: Quitting alcohol consumption

From the survey participants, 19.9% had been successful in quitting alcohol consumption at the time of administering the survey.

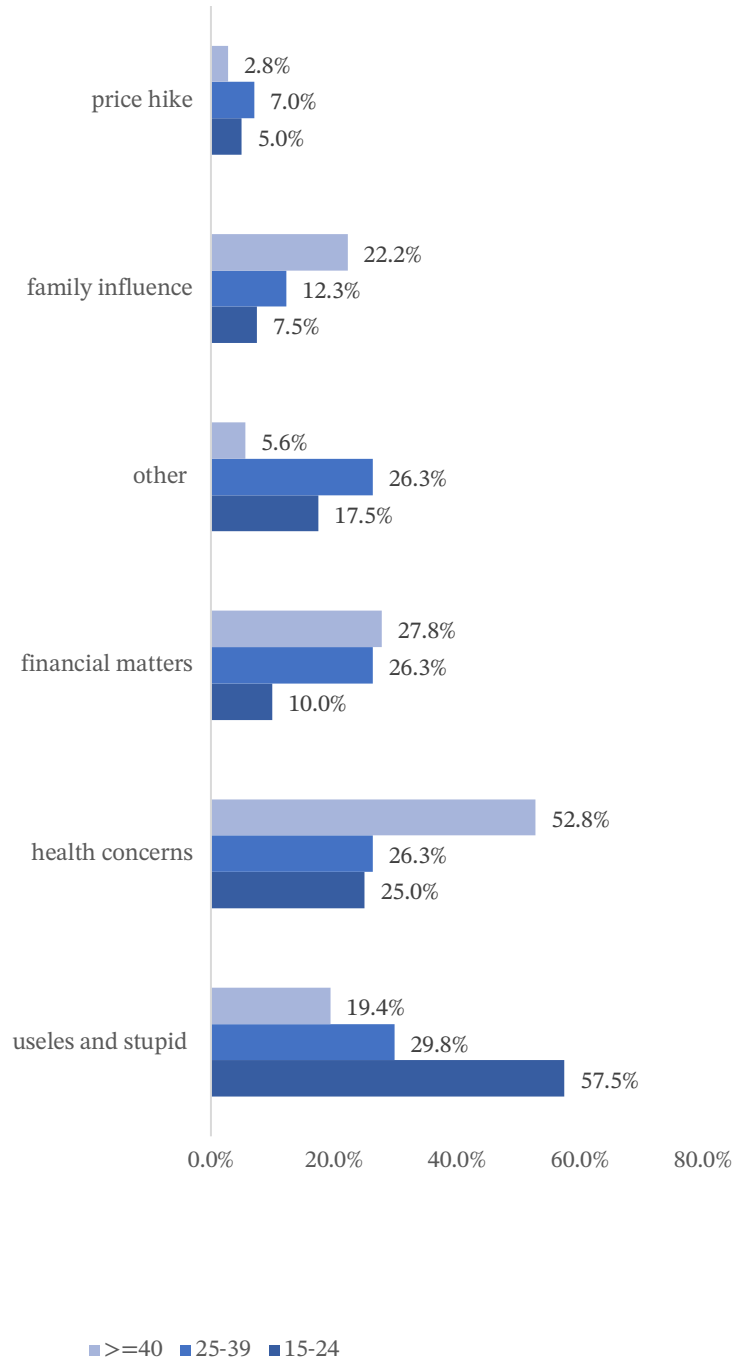


Figure 16: Reasons for quitting alcohol use

During the survey, the alcohol consumers in all three age groups were asked about the reasons which caused them to change their alcohol consumption pattern in the six months prior to the survey. Perceiving alcohol consumption as a useless behaviour and health concerns were presented as reasons

by the majority of the survey participants in the lower age groups, while health concerns, financial matters and family influence were reported as the most important reasons by the individuals of 40 years and above.

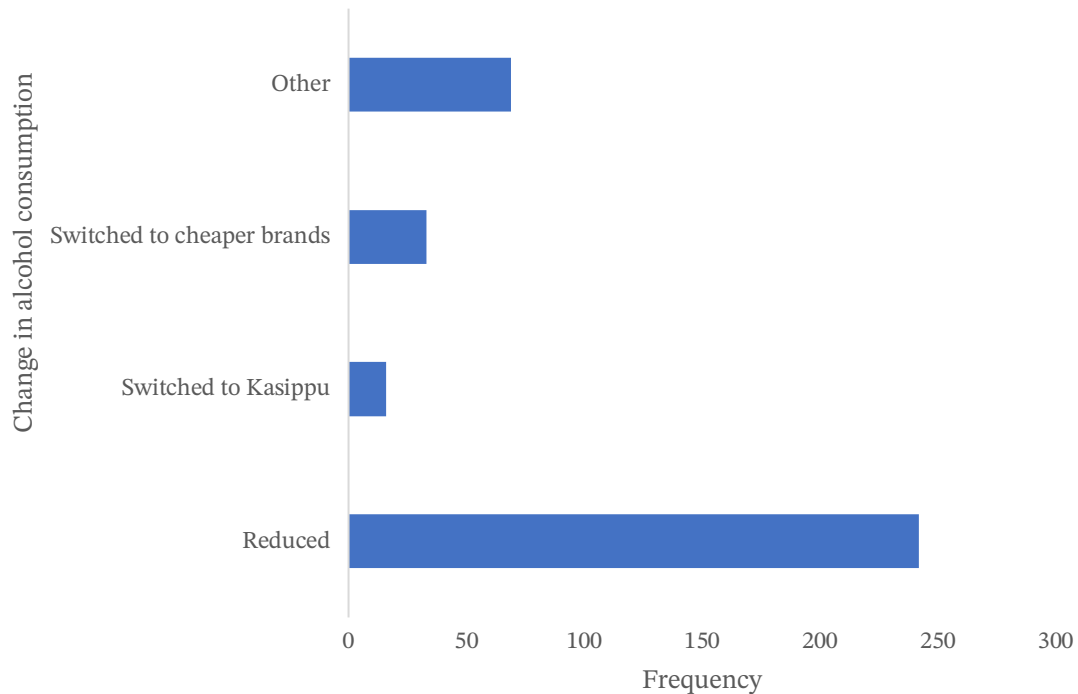


Figure 17: The impact of price changes on alcohol consumption

The survey participants were inquired about the effect of the change in alcohol prices on their consumption patterns. Most of the participants have reduced their alcohol consumption due to the price increases. Others have switched to cheaper brands. A very low percentage has also switched to Kasippu as a result of price hikes.

### 3.3.5 Expenditure on alcohol

Table 2: Monthly expenditure on alcohol among different age groups

	No: of participants	Median (in rupees)	Interquartile Range (in rupees)	Min - Max (in rupees)
<b>All current users</b>				
15-24 years	103	422.00	344	252-936
25-39 years	152	467.00	454	236-862
40 years and above	115	344.00	349	246-2952

Table 5 represents data on monthly expenditure among current alcohol consumers based on the age category. Median value of the monthly expenditure is highest among the age group 25-39 years (Rs. 467.00).

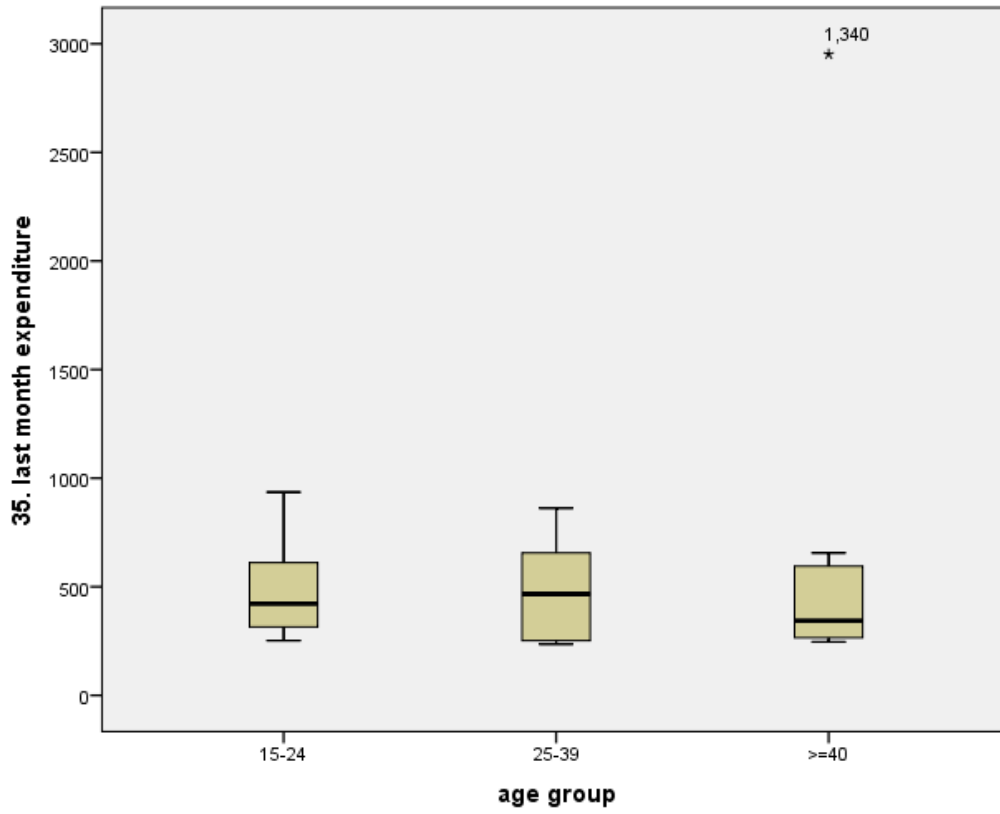


Figure 18: Monthly expenditure on alcohol in different age groups

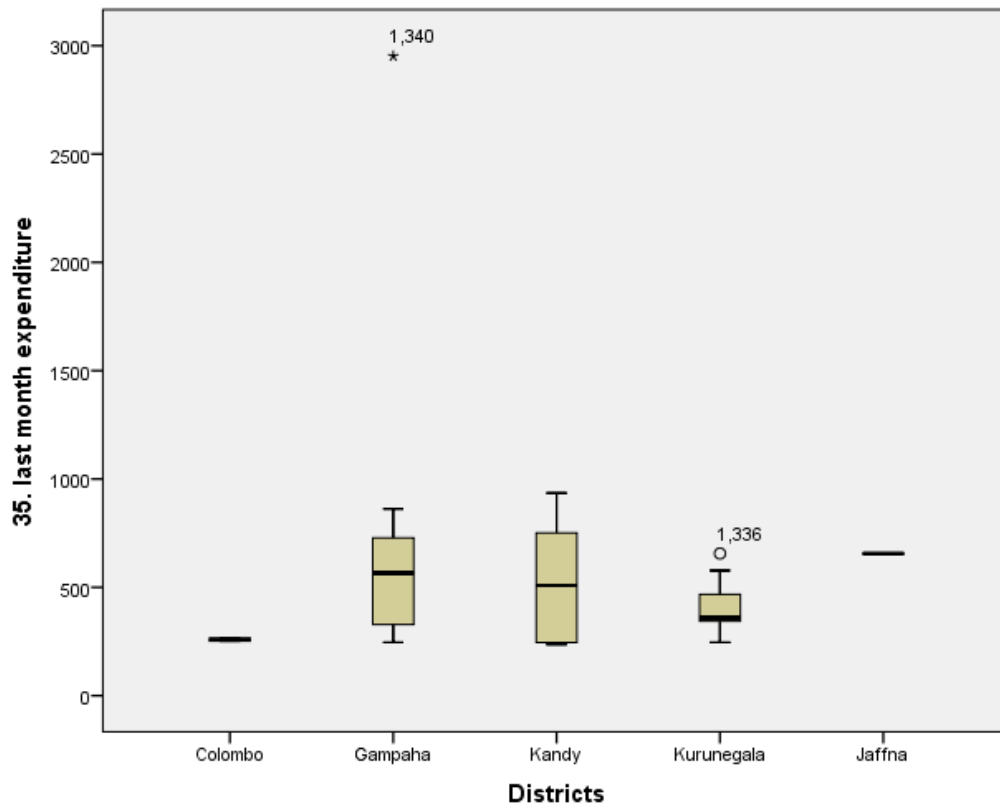


Figure 19: Monthly expenditure on alcohol in selected districts

### 3.3.6 Miscellaneous results

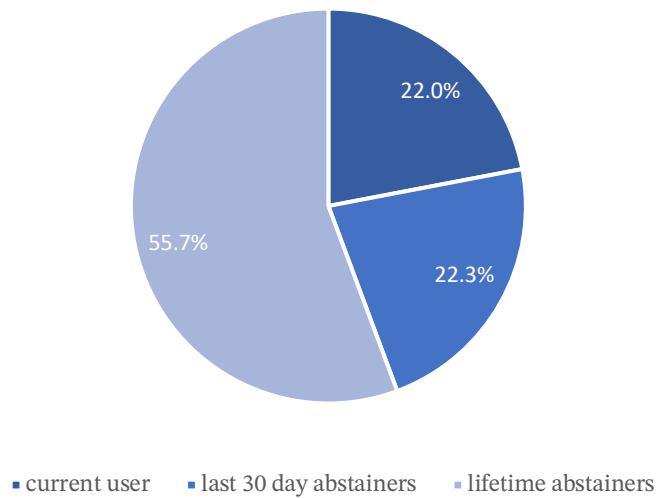


Figure 20: Status of alcohol consumption below 21 years

In Sri Lanka, carrying out alcohol sales to individuals below 21 years of age is prohibited by law. However, through the results obtained from the survey, it was identified that there is still a percentage of 22.0% between 15-21 years of age, who are current consumers, even though the majority of this age group (55.7%) are lifetime abstainers.

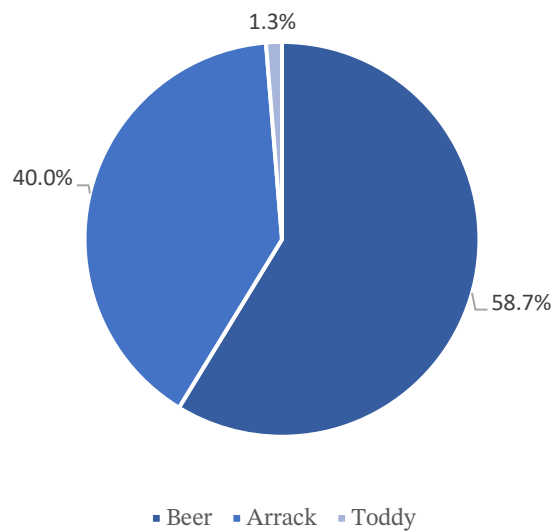


Figure 21: Type of alcohol products used by consumers below 21 years

The majority (58.7%) of the current alcohol consumers below the age of 21 years have reported that they consume Beer while the second most popular product among these survey participants was reported as arrack (40.0%). Consumption of toddy is comparatively low among this age group (1.3%).

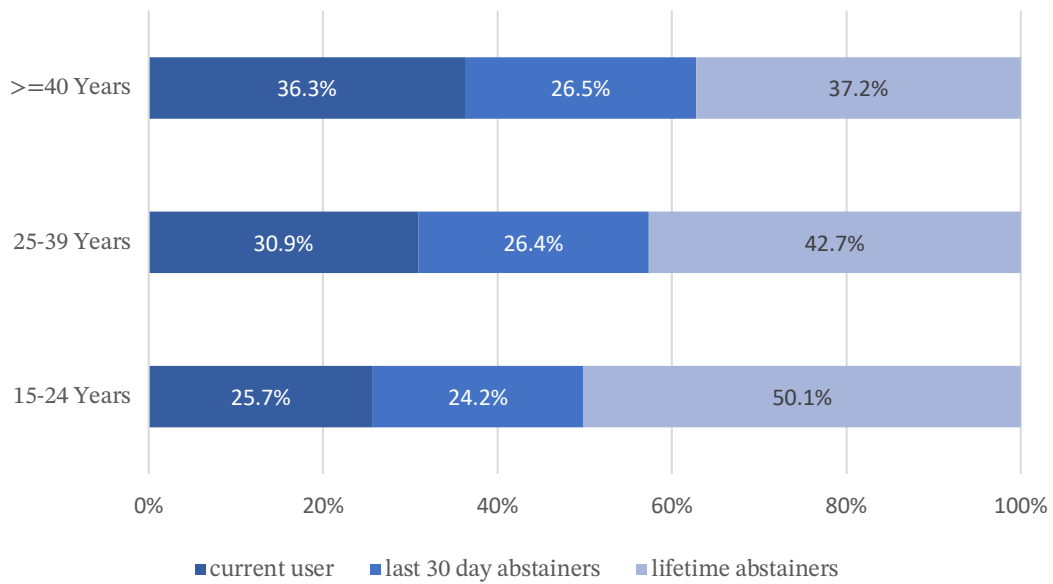


Figure 22: Usage of alcohol within the three age groups

In all three age categories, lifetime abstainers were prominent. From the three age groups, the highest percentage of lifetime abstainers was present in the age group 15-24 years (50.1%). Current users were highest in the age group 40 years and above (36.3%).

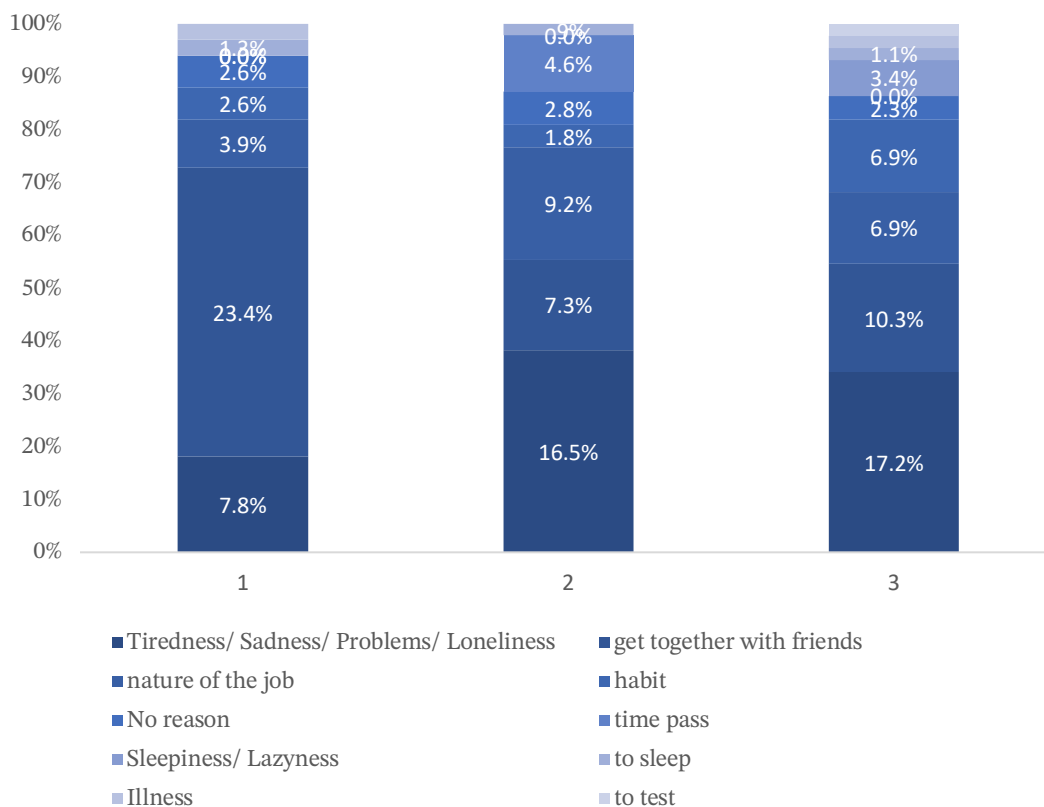


Figure 23: Reasons for alcohol consumption

The graph shows that a high percentage in all three age groups have stated that they consume alcohol due to tiredness/sadness/problems/ loneliness. A considerable percentage also consume alcohol to get



together with friends. The reasons given by the survey participants seem to be different from one another, making them controversial.

Trend of alcohol consumption within the last 10 years by different age groups (2014-2023)

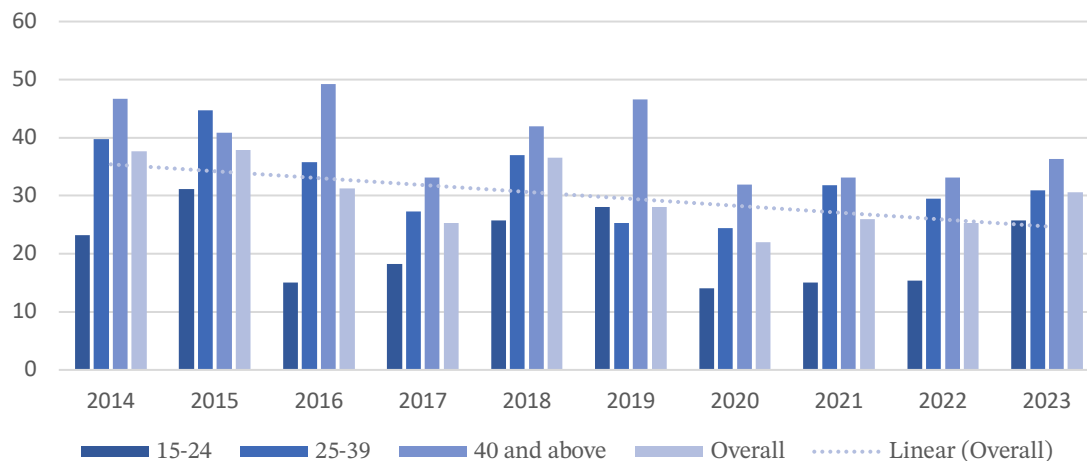


Figure 24: Trend of alcohol consumption within the last 10 years

An overall decreasing trend in alcohol use can be observed during the last ten years, from 2014 to 2023.

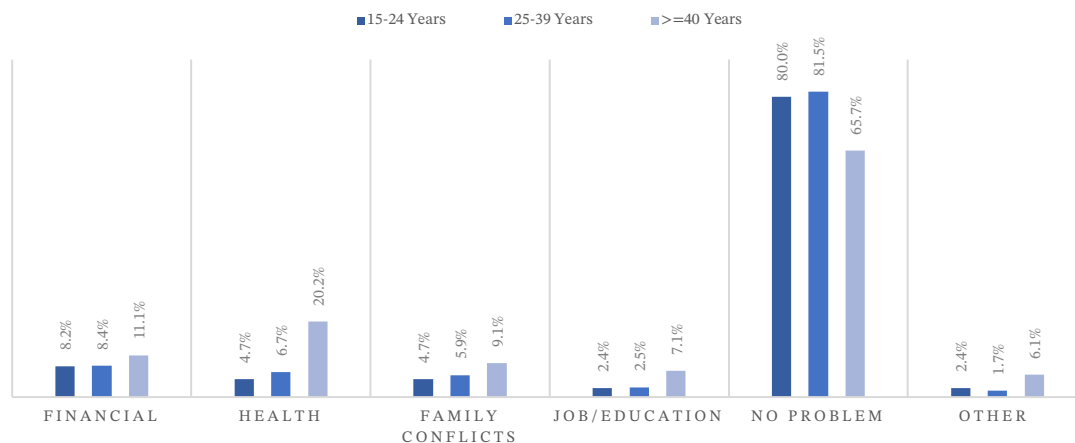


Figure 25: Problems faced by alcohol consumers

The majority of the alcohol consumers have stated that they do not face any issues due to alcohol use. This might be an indication of the low level of knowledge regarding the harm of alcohol use among the majority of the users. Financial problems, family conflicts and health issues have been stated as issues associated with alcohol use by other users.

## 4. Discussion

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In Sri Lanka, alcohol consumption occurs in differing levels within different cultural, demographic and socio-economic groups. Alcohol consumption at any volume or any frequency leads to a significant range of harmful effects among users. Alcohol has been identified as a main causal factor in 7 out of 10 deaths occurring in Sri Lanka. Therefore, alcohol has been recognized as a significant risk factor behind mortality and burden of health expenditure of the country, and prevailing economic issues within communities.

ADIC has been conducting trend surveys on alcohol consumption within Sri Lanka since 1998, to identify the status of alcohol use within the country, and to use the data obtained through the surveys for effective implementation of alcohol control policies and to develop successful community interventions for alcohol prevention. The year 2023 had been a challenging year due to the slow recovery from the drastic economic situation faced by Sri Lankans in the previous years due to the economic and political crisis. However, the trend survey was successfully conducted, revealing important facts on alcohol consumption trends within the country. The present alcohol trend survey provides a detailed overview of alcohol consumption patterns in 2023 and the change in consumption compared to previous years.

During this period, the prices of alcohol products increased as a result of a rise in alcohol taxation by 14% by the beginning of July 2023. Many alcohol consumers have reduced the frequency of consumption due to high prices and reduced affordability of alcohol. The response of alcohol users to price changes created declining accessibility to alcohol. Findings on frequency of alcohol consumption in 2023 demonstrate that daily consumption reports the lowest percentage for two of the age groups (15-24- and 25-39-year-olds). Moreover, the findings show a significant reduction of the maximum spending on alcohol by age groups in 2023. These findings together suggest the influence of the increase in taxes on restricting the use of alcohol.

When considering the district-wise comparison, the highest alcohol usage was reported in Colombo district, while the lowest usage was reported in the Jaffna district. Regardless of the type of product, age category and occupation, the majority of the current users were monthly users, while a considerably high percentage also stated that they consumed alcohol daily. As the users are spending a considerable sum of their hard-earned money on alcohol, it has a direct impact on the economy and development within their families and the society as a whole. This indicates the significant need for further alcohol control policies such as a scientific taxation system to bring revenue to the government and to reduce alcohol usage.

Beer and arrack are the most popular products among all types of users according to the survey findings. This is similar to the situation in 2022, where the most popular alcoholic beverage was also beer. Even at the initiation of alcohol use, beer was reported to be the most prominently used product. Arrack and Beer are commercially produced and advertised through the media, which might be the cause of them being perceived as the most popular alcohol products among the majority of current consumers.

Most of the survey participants had initiated alcohol use between the ages 18-20 years, and the survey revealed that a significant number of current alcohol consumers reported that their initiation occurred at big matches (35.6%), particularly at leading schools where large gatherings of students occur. It is the current trend, where these events often feature alcohol stalls managed by alumni, serving as a

strategic promotion by the alcohol industry to target vulnerable school-aged children. Therefore, the survey highlights the fact that this situation requires careful attention and action from schools and educational authorities.

When inquired about the reasons for continuing alcohol consumption, various reasons had been stated by the survey participants for alcohol use, which are different from one another and quite controversial (e.g.: some use alcohol to stay up while some have mentioned it helps them to sleep). When considering the knowledge of the respondents about the issues which occur due to their alcohol use, a high percentage of current alcohol users in all 3 age groups have reported no issues have been faced due to alcohol use. This is a clear indication that the majority of users are not aware of the extent of harm alcohol causes to their lives. It similarly demonstrates the need for increasing the awareness of alcohol harms in the community.

From the survey participants, 19.9% had been successful in quitting alcohol consumption at the time of administering the survey. The most common reasons for quitting were given as the realization that alcohol consumption is a purposeless behavior, health concerns, financial issues as well as price increases of alcohol products. Therefore, it is a timely need to further disseminate the knowledge regarding the health, economic and social impact of alcohol use among more individuals, encouraging them to change their behavior with regard to alcohol use, improving their overall well-being. Furthermore, the survey findings revealed that the tax increases on alcohol products in 2023 had resulted in reduced alcohol consumption among the majority of the current consumers. This further implies that the increase in excise duty for alcohol products has caused a reduction in alcohol consumption among individuals due to the increased prices and decreased affordability of alcohol. This finding supports the recommendation by the World Health Organization (WHO), where alcohol taxation and pricing policies are among the scientifically proven most effective and cost-effective alcohol control measures. An increase in excise taxes on alcoholic beverages is a proven measure to reduce alcohol use, while reducing initiations, and it further provides governments revenue to offset the economic costs of alcohol use.<sup>3</sup>

The survey findings further challenge the already established alcohol policies within Sri Lanka. National Authority on Tobacco and Alcohol Act No. 27 enacted in 2006 imposes the legal boundaries on selling alcohol and it is prohibited to sell alcohol products for individuals under the age 21 years. However, the survey reveals that a percentage of 22.0% between 15-21 years of age is current consumers, which is an increase from the previous year, indicating the prevalence of alcohol sales to underaged individuals even amidst legal prohibitions established within the country. Therefore, it is imperative for educational and other relevant government authorities to take required action to mitigate this situation, to reduce alcohol initiations among the individuals below 21 years of age, while contributing to the positive trend of reduced alcohol consumption within the country.

The overall trend of alcohol use within the last decade depicts a decline in the consumption of alcohol. The alcohol control measures, and the community interventions established by interested parties have been largely effective in reducing alcohol use within the country. The findings of the survey demonstrate the latest situation of alcohol consumption in Sri Lanka. The information will provide guidance to all interested organizations and individuals to choose appropriate approaches to enforce evidence-based alcohol control policies and develop prevention interventions targeting user specific consumption patterns in the country.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/initiatives/SAFER/pricing-policies>



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