

# In Trust Territory JJ

# Alcohol Use, Abuse Paper Ready

Boon-ahle

SAIPAN (MNS) - A report released by the office of the High Commissioner this week indicates alcoholic beverages constitute the sixth largest class of commodities imported into Micronesia, amounting to about \$1,688,847 or 6 per cent of the total value of all imports.

The research document also indicates alcoholic abuse is a major social problem in Micronesia.

The report says the volume of beer, spirits and wine imported for the territory from 1969-1972 has more than doubled. The report notes that in some districts, such as Truk, the increase has been nearly five-fold. The only exception is Pohnpei, which saw a drop in alcoholic beverage import, presumably because for 12 of those 48 months all bars in that district were closed.

The report points out that despite this increase, 1972 consumption of alcohol in Micronesia, extrapolated from import data, was \$29 a person, lower than that of the United States for 1971 which was \$39 a person.

The report notes that the per capita figure may be deceptive because the sale of liquor is not legally permitted in most municipalities, but tends to be confined to the six district centers and a few "wet" municipalities.

The study asserts that 75 per cent of alcohol imported into Micronesia is consumed by 25 per cent of the population.

"Heavy consumers" are makes between the ages of 14 and 35, the report notes. Among this group, the report pointed out, per capita consumption is estimated between \$80 and \$183 in the several districts during 1972.

Although it is commonly thought that alcoholic abuse constitutes a serious problem for all Micronesian males, the problem seems to be in the younger ranks of "heavy consumers," according to the report. This seems to be the cause of a higher concentration of criminal convictions among males between the ages of 15 and 25, it was reported.

This suggests special social and cultural factors may be at work, in addition to psychic and metabolic deficiencies, that render this segment of the population prone to problem drinking, the report suggests, noting that this group is in particular need of special attention apart from that which may become available through the Health Services Department's anti-alcoholism grant of \$1.5 million.

The report says violent crimes and "crimes of passion" seem to be alcohol-related in Micronesian society. The report indicates those crimes appear to have a higher incidence in the districts of Yap, Palau and Truk where sustained contact with the West came later, usually in the last quarter of the 19th century, and more abruptly and where the clash between

traditional behavior patterns and western values is most acute.

Evidence from the Marianas and the Marshalls suggests exposure to alternative patterns of using alcohol can produce behaviors which would be less threatening socially and less physically hazardous, the report states.

Among other things, the report identifies social causes of "alcoholic abuse - due to boredom" for want of recreational and occupational activities, indicating this feeling is shared by other members of the community. Also, the report notes, young men have developed "exalted material expectations" and new values of personal liberty and advancement that only a very few young Micronesians are able to satisfy.

The report points out that drinking, particularly in the traditional all-male pattern, provides a temporary release for these frustrations, adding that district center bars bring together men of diverse localities, families and traditions and thus "tend to create a threatening rather than a supportive situation."

According to the report, law

enforcement is often lax and justice overly lenient. The report indicates juvenile law breakers are undeterred since there are no facilities for juveniles in the TT penal system.

There are other causes of alcoholic abuse, the report states. Traditional authority figures are "unsure of their control," being themselves caught in the conflict of values and legal systems, and as a consequence, young men tend to disregard their direction and advice, notes the report.

The report points out that the educational system of Micronesia is increasingly creating frustrations as more and more young people graduate without marketable vocational skills. The report says the frustrations of being under-educated or over-educated and without a satisfying job also tend to produce drinking problems.

Based on these findings, the report says there is a need for a comprehensive program of social services directed toward young men between 15 and 25.

The report also recommends that a program of youth services be established to attract and involve as many young people as

possible in planning and implementing its activities. Such a program should include sports and other recreational activities; it was recommended.

The High Commissioner should be invited to initiate efforts to improve enforcement and interpretation of the law on the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages, and the punishment of offenders in alcohol-related crimes, misdemeanors, and vehicle accidents, the report says. Secondly, the chief justice should be prevailed upon to devote at least one day of his annual judicial conference with Micronesian district judges to a discussion of appropriate penalties in alcohol-related cases, recommends the report.

Thirdly, the TT government should, budget for the construction and staffing of detention facilities for juveniles under 18 and for high school students attending school during their period of sentence.

Finally, the Congress of Micronesia is called upon to study and adopt more effective laws governing the sale of alcohol and alcohol-related crimes and to effectively prevent drinking by minors.

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