



INTRODUCTION

South-East Asian societies are in transition amidst changing states of growth and development due to macro and micro level influences. The shift from agrarian to modern societies has led to people changing emotionally, culturally and socially. This influences every sphere of their lives. The impact of globalization, industrialization, migration and media invasion into the lives of people is noticeable and palpable. People are embracing new lifestyles, cultures and practices, giving rise to new problems such as the increasing use and abuse of alcohol. Governments, representing their citizens, in the pursuit of socio-economic growth and development, are also reacting to these changing global and national influences.

Alcohol is a psychoactive substance which has an effect on people in multifarious ways. It acts primarily on the central nervous system, both immediately and over a period of time, and affects, both directly and indirectly, almost all body organs and systems. Alcoholic beverages contain ethyl alcohol (ethanol), produced as a result of the fermentation of starch which includes grains (beer), vegetables (vodka) and fruits (wine). Ethyl alcohol has no taste and is a colourless liquid. Each alcoholic beverage is different in taste and the way it looks, due to the presence of other substances which are added deliberately or accidentally. The manufacturing process also gives a distinct flavour and colour to the alcoholic beverage.

Alcohol is absorbed directly into the bloodstream through the walls of the stomach and the small intestine, and is then quickly distributed to all parts of the body. All alcohol that is consumed enters the bloodstream and then goes to the brain. It takes only a few minutes for alcohol to reach the brain and begin to act. The liver is the key organ digesting alcohol, and on an average it takes about one hour for the liver to completely digest a standard alcoholic drink (Benegal, 2001).

Traditional societies are gradually adopting modern lifestyles, giving rise to new problems.

