



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press statement

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CAP: Samsu, A Social Poison

Samsu is cheap intoxicating liquor, widely consumed by young people. CAP survey showed that once commonly consumed by estate workers and village folks it has now become a trendy drink among the urbanites. It is popularly drunk by youths of all races and foreign workers.

It has been a common practice among youth to mix samsu with cola or carbonated drinks or pour it into plastic bags with ice cubes and sip it with straw.

The alcohol content in this cheap liquor is alarming high ranging from 17% to 48%. Diseases associated with alcohol include cancers, liver disorders, cirrhosis of liver and heart ailments, due to high content of alcohol, the health of many poor people are ruined. Manufactures of samsu have resorted to many misleading health claims. One brand recommends it for anaemia, loss of appetite, indigestion and “touts it healing properties. “

Children as young as 12 years can be found consuming samsu and our survey showed that mainly school dropouts are easy targets for this cheap liquor.

There are over a hundred brands of samsu available in the market. This intoxicating liquor gained its popularity because of its cheap price and easy availability. Buying samsu is as simple as buying sweets or candy in sundry shops. Anyone, including children can buy it without any hassle.

The price for a bottle of samsu 150ml varies from between RM3.00 to RM5.00, hence making it affordable to children.

Regular drinkers can easily buy samsu on credit.

Under Section 32(1) and 33(1) of the Excise Act 1976, no person can sell (either wholesale or retail) intoxicating liquor either for use within a premise or outside without a license. The license issued must specify the precise place where sale is allowed. Any sale without a license is an offence under the Act.

A license is required for the sale of samsu. However the demand is great and thus some shops do not even bother to apply for license to sell this killer brew.

In the past CAP has made several reports to the Customs and Excise Department about the illegal sale of samsu. However, till today the illegal sale of samsu is still prevailing. There is an increased number of unlicensed dealers are engaging in samsu sale.

Samsu addictions has brought untold damages to families and communities. Not only the drinkers are affected but women and children will also suffer the ramification of the drinking habits of their husbands and fathers.

The monthly expenditure on samsu eats up big portion of the family's income. Someone who is new to samsu may spend about RM90 a month on the liquor. As he gets addicted and starts to drink more and he may end spending up to RM300 a month on it.

Both locals and foreign workers are spending that much. Foreign workers drank to "drown" their long hours of work (up to 18 hours) and tiredness.

Taking an average monthly income of RM600, this would means that more than half of his income is drained down his throat in the form of samsu. This is usually at the expense of more needful necessities such as food and clothing for children.

One housewife in CAP's survey said that her husband even stole money from the house to buy samsu. "Once he stole two chickens to buy this evil drink," she said.

With current price hike of food and household products, this drinking habit will the cause more social problems and can lead to violence, child abuse, traffic accidents, suicides marriage breakups and homicide. Even foreign workers are sending less or no money home to their families as they can no longer afford to do so.

Immediate positive measures need to be taken in order to stop the growing problem of samsu sale and addiction in order to protect our society from the socials ills and serious health hazards of samsu.

The Excise Act 1976 should be strictly enforced to prevent the illegal sale of samsu. Unlicensed dealers of samsu and other liquors must be singled out and given mandatory jail sentence.

Meanwhile the price of intoxicating liquor should be based on it's alcohol content; if the alcohol content is high the price should be costly as this can prevent easy accessibility to youths.

With what is happening, we are looking at an unfolding social tragedy and the government is slow in addressing the problem.

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