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**INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ALCOHOL POLICIES NOTES
GLOBAL PARADIGM SHIFT AS HEALTH OFFICIALS AND
RESEARCHERS PUT GREATER EMPHASIS ON DRINKING PATTERNS**

***The Development of Alcohol Policy Is Based Increasingly on Understanding
That How People Drink Is as Important as How Much They Drink***

WASHINGTON, D.C., [Date] – A new report by the International Center for Alcohol Policies (ICAP) highlights an important global paradigm shift as researchers, educators, and public health officials put greater focus on drinking patterns as the basis for developing effective alcohol policy.

Released this month, “Drinking Patterns: From Theory to Practice,” the fifteenth in a series of reports published by ICAP, reviews the large and growing body of scientific literature on drinking patterns. The new report notes that in the mid-1990s, the patterns approach was a relatively novel concept when ICAP brought together key researchers and policy makers and in 1997 published “Drinking Patterns and Their Consequences”, a landmark book on the subject.

“In the last seven years, alcohol researchers, educators and public health officials have come to regard drinking patterns as the new orthodoxy of the alcohol field,” said Marcus Grant, president of ICAP. “This report offers an overview of how the patterns approach has evolved into a worldwide phenomenon, and led to increasingly effective public policy, treatment and prevention programs.”

How, Where, When, Why, and What People Drink

Based on a review of international studies conducted between 1998 and 2003, the new report looks at the styles, context and cultural dimensions of drinking patterns worldwide. Patterns include who drinkers are and where, when, what, and how they consume drinks.

According to the report, this research provides a wealth of information and insight into drinking behaviors and their potential “outcomes” – some positive, such as enjoyment, health benefits, and enhanced quality of life; others negative, including accidents and injuries. Heavy drinking patterns may be associated with increased health risks, while low or moderate consumption may be associated with benefits, including the now well reported cardio-protective effect for certain groups of individuals. The report notes, “without research into drinking patterns, these important differences would not be apparent.”

Heavier Drinking Patterns Linked to More Severe Injury

Among negative outcomes, analyses of emergency room data suggest that the severity of injuries sustained may be associated with drinking patterns, with heavier drinking patterns resulting in more severe injury. The report states that drinking patterns have a major effect on interpersonal relationships, financial consequences, and public and personal safety. Road traffic accidents, violence and aggression have been linked with some drinking patterns, but not with others.

Studies also tie drinking styles to certain professions, while income may also be related to drinking style with moderate drinkers likely to earn more than abstainers or heavy drinkers. Gender, age, and ethnic differences are also key elements in how pattern shapes drinking outcomes.

Examining the diversity of drinking cultures around the world, the report states that drinking patterns among rural and urban populations differ regardless of the country studied, and that cultural and social acceptability of certain harmful patterns varies markedly.

More Research Still Needed, Especially for Developing Countries.

Data on patterns have been collected at the national level in many countries, and the trends in drinking pattern can now be studied comparatively over time. But, the report notes, there is still a dearth of information about drinking patterns in developing countries. Yet certain dramatic shifts are discernable. Some regions, including Mediterranean countries, are shifting away from traditional beverages and patterns. Social changes in developing and transition countries are resulting in traditional drinking patterns giving way to a more Western style of drinking.

The report points out that the patterns paradigm increasingly informs alcohol policy and prevention measures. A “one-size-fits-all” approach targeted to the general population is less likely to work well for certain groups, such as repeat drunk drivers or young people, who often need specially designed approaches.

The biannual ICAP Reports are intended to summarize current scientific information on a given topic or present issues concerned with alcohol that may require further study. Other recent ICAP Reports include “International Drinking Guidelines” (#14), “Alcohol and the Workplace” (#13) and “Violence and Licensed Premises” (#12).

Established in 1995 to promote global public/private partnerships in the area of alcohol policy, ICAP is supported by 10 major international beverage companies that aid the not-for-profit organization to bridge the industry-public health policy gap. ICAP is dedicated to promoting understanding of the role of alcohol in society and to helping reduce the abuse of alcohol worldwide through dialogue and partnerships involving the beverage industry, the public health community and others interested in alcohol policy. “Drinking Patterns: From Theory to Practice” can be read by visiting ICAP’s Web site at www.icap.org.

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