Original Research

Assessing knowledge and attitudes of owners or managers of hospitality venues regarding a policy banning indoor smoking

G. Alaaeddine [a], T. Al Kuhaimi [a], R. Al Assaad [a], M. Dany [a], R. Diab [a], E. Hanna [a], N. Hirmas [a], H. Ismail [a], D. Mahmassani [a], R. Sleiman Tellawi [a], R. Nakkash [b,*]

[a] Faculty of Medicine, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon
[b] Department of Health Promotion and Community Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, American University of Beirut, PO Box 11-0236, Riad El Solh, Beirut 1107-2020, Lebanon

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SUMMARY

Objectives: In response to accumulating evidence on the detrimental health effects of second-hand smoke, governments throughout the world have adopted laws prohibiting indoor smoking in public places. Lebanon has recently enacted a law prohibiting indoor smoking in all of its forms, rendered effective as of 3 September 2012. This study examined the knowledge and attitudes of owners/managers of restaurants, cafes, pubs and night-clubs in Beirut towards the ban, three months before it came into effect.

Study design: Self-administered cross-sectional survey.

Methods: Data were derived from a self-administered cross-sectional survey conducted in June 2012. In total, 262 hospitality venues (restaurants, cafes, pubs and nightclubs) were sampled at random to participate.

Results: The response rate was 74% (194/262). Overall, 84% of owners/managers reported that they were aware of the ban, yet the average knowledge score was only 3.43/10. A general positive attitude was noted towards customer satisfaction (44.8%), law enforcement (61.1%) and employee protection from second-hand smoke (74%), while 55% of owners/managers were concerned that their revenues would decrease. However, 83.3% expressed their willingness to implement the law.

Conclusions: This quantitative study is the first to examine the knowledge and attitudes of owners/managers of hospitality venues regarding the indoor smoking ban in Lebanon. Civil society and government bodies should use the findings to develop a campaign to address the knowledge and attitudes of owners/managers of hospitality venues to ensure successful enforcement.

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Introduction

In the battle against second-hand smoke, governments throughout the world have adopted laws prohibiting indoor smoking in public places. Several studies have reported the positive effects of such laws,[1,2] and other studies have reported that smoking regulations not only serve towards eliminating the hazards of second-hand smoking, but also contribute towards changing social norms and decreasing the rates of smoking among youths and adults.[2]

Studies conducted in Italy, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA have confirmed that smoking bans do not have any detrimental effect on restaurant sales. This invalidates the fears of owners/managers of hospitality venues with regards to customer and employee turnover.[3—6] However, the attitudes of the hospitality sector on the global front concerning a total smoking ban seem to vary amongst owners and managers. In Kunming City, China, for instance, only 17% of surveyed restaurant managers were found to support a total smoking ban in restaurants,[7] while 60% were found to support a statewide smoking ban prior to its implementation in North Carolina, USA. In Japan, restaurants' compliance with and application of smoking restrictions were found to be influenced by the smoking status of the restaurant owner.[8]

Studies conducted worldwide have demonstrated the positive outcomes associated with the implementation of smoking bans, particularly with regards to customer satisfaction, revenues and employee health. In light of the above, governments all around the world, including Lebanon, should be more inclined to implement such laws.

Hyland et al. reported that Lebanon was one of the three countries with the highest concentrations of smoke particles in indoor public places,[9] as both cigarette and waterpipe smoking are commonly practised in enclosed public places. In fact, up to 60% of Lebanese hospitality venues that permitted indoor smoking were demonstrated to have dangerous levels of air pollution according to the World Health Organization's air quality guidelines.[10]

Considering the diverse detrimental effects of second-hand smoke, a smoking ban is indispensable in Lebanon for the protection of public health.[11] However, in spite of Ministerial Decision 1/213 issued in 1993[12] to control smoking in public places, and ratification of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2005, Lebanon has only recently enacted a comprehensive indoor smoking ban.[13] New hopes are now directed towards the first comprehensive tobacco control law (Law No. 174), hereafter referred to as 'the ban', passed by the Lebanese Parliament in August 2011. The latter completely prohibits indoor smoking in all of its forms in all public places, including hospitality venues, as of 3 September 2012; bans tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship; stipulates text and pictorial health warnings covering 40% of both front and back of cigarette packets; and obliges public venue owners to hang visible 'No Smoking' signage. Transgressors of this law will be penalized, with liabilities shared by both the smoker and the establishment.

This study examined the knowledge and attitudes of owners and managers of restaurants, cafes, pubs and nightclubs in Beirut towards the indoor smoking ban, three months before it came into effect. It is the first study to evaluate aspects of this new tobacco control policy, and its findings may present a clearer perception of the expected readiness and/or compliance of the hospitality sector to enforce the recent ban.

Methods

Study design

This research study was conducted over a 6-week period, commencing in June 2012, following approval by the Institutional Review Board of the American University of Beirut.

Sampling

The Lebanese Yellow Pages Business Directory lists 773 restaurants, cafes, pubs and nightclubs registered in Beirut. The survey was pretested in eight of the establishments on this list. A sample size calculation with a 95% confidence level, a 0.05 significance level and a power of 80% indicated that a study sample size of 238 was required. This was increased by 10% to allow for non-responses, resulting in a total sample size of 262. This was distributed proportionally among the four types of venues in the target population (i.e. 155 restaurants, 29 cafes, 64 pubs and 14 nightclubs). An online random sampling generator was used to select the venues that were targeted during the data collection phase.

Data collection

Surveyors, in groups of two, approached the owners or managers of the venues selected to participate. Owners/managers who were not available at the first visit were revisited at least twice, after which the venue in question was excluded. Venues that referred the surveyors to headquarters were also excluded due to time limitations for completion of the survey.

Survey

Participants were asked to complete a survey instrument in Arabic; an English version was also made available on request. The survey included an informative pre-amble explaining the objectives and nature of this study, and encompassed 40 questions categorized into four sections: general information, venue information, knowledge about the ban, and attitudes towards the ban. Following completion of the survey, participants were handed a copy of the Manager's Guide to Banning Smoking, issued by the Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, National Tobacco Control Programme.

Statistical analysis

Data entry and analysis were conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 17.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA), using both descriptive and analytical statistics with univariate and bivariate analyses. For the latter, Chi-squared tests were used to assess the relationships between knowledge of the ban and eight independent variables: highest educational achievement (school or vocational education, university education), occupational position (manager, owner, both), smoking status of manager/owner [smoker, non-