Smokers Support New Smokefree Environments: National Survey Data from New Zealand

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**Aim**
To determine smokers’ support for a range of new smokefree environments in a country that has had some long-standing smokefree settings (ie. smokefree indoor workplaces since 1990, fully smokefree bars/restaurants since 2003, but no smokefree car laws and outdoors smokefree laws restricted to school grounds and a minority of smokefree council parks and playgrounds).

**Methods**
Subjects were participants in the first wave of the NZ arm of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Survey (ITC Project). The NZ ITC cohort is derived from a nationally representative Health Survey, which included booster sampling of Maori (indigenous New Zealanders) and people of Pacific Island and Asian ethnic groups.

For wave one, 1376 smokers aged 18+ took part in phone interviews between March 2007 to February 2008. Results were weighted to reflect the national population of smokers and the complex sample design.

We assessed attitudes to smoking in different settings (using standard ITC Project questions and ones relevant to the NZ setting). “Strong support” for smokefree places was defined by a score of ≥3.5 (on a smokefree support scale cf. 0.0 – 5.0). Further details on the survey methods are available elsewhere (Methods Report: http://www.wnmeds.ac.nz/itcproject.html).

**Results**

**Smoker support for smokefree areas:** A clear majority of smokers supported three new smokefree areas. That is, only a minority agreed that smoking should be allowed: in cars with pre-school children (33%), anywhere in outdoor eating areas (22%), and at council-owned playgrounds (32%) (Figure 1).

These attitudes were generally compatible with the findings that most of the smokers surveyed (87%) reported trying to minimise the amount that non-smokers were exposed to their cigarette smoke, and reported never smoking in a car with non-smokers (73%).

In contrast, there was majority support for allowing smoking on lifeguard-patrolled beaches (65%), and in at least some of the outdoor seating areas of restaurants/cafés (51%) and pubs (53%) (Figure 1).

**Variables associated with smoker support:** In the multivariate analyses, “strong support” for new smokefree areas by smokers was associated with knowledge of the second-hand smoke (SHS) hazard, and behaviours to reduce SHS exposure towards others (eg. for the former in the logistic regression: adjusted odds ratio (aOR)=1.51, 95% CI=1.13 – 2.03).

“Strong support” was also associated with the adoption of smokefree cars (aOR=1.74, 95% CI=1.25 – 2.42); and support for tobacco control regulatory measures by government (aOR=1.66, 95% CI=1.34 – 2.04). There was also significantly stronger support for smokefree areas by Maori and Asian smokers, and also smokers with “smoking-induced deprivation”. However, there was no significant association by deprivation level (using a small area measure).

**Discussion**

There was clear majority support by these smokers for three types of smokefree areas not covered by current smokefree legislation (including in cars and some outdoor areas). Whilst response bias in this study may cause some overestimates of the true prevalence of support among smokers, these findings suggest that most smokers will comply with such new laws.

Public support is not the only criterion for assessing whether these laws should be introduced. However, the findings suggest that central government and/or local government should continue to consider the introduction of new smokefree laws, especially in cars and outdoor areas.

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