

Smoking, occupancy and staffing levels in a selection of Dublin pubs pre and post a national smoking ban, lessons for all

ABSTRACT

Background On the 29th March 2004 the Irish government introduced a comprehensive workplace smoking ban to protect the health of workers. This study evaluates the impact the ban had on staffing levels, customer numbers and smoking rates in a sample of 38 public houses in Dublin.

Methods A total of 38 public houses were visited prior to the introduction of the ban, each visit lasted at least three hours, and the number of staff, customers and the number of people smoking was recorded each hour. Follow-up visits were conducted exactly one year later, on the same day of the week and at the same time of day, allowing controlling for seasonal and weekday effects.

Results There was a decrease (8.82%) in average staff levels while customer numbers increased by 11% and there was a dramatic reduction in numbers smoking on a visit to a pub (77.8%).

Conclusions The hospitality industry predicted major job losses as a consequence of the introduction of the smoking ban; this work has shown that there was no significant decrease in the number of staff employed or in customer numbers. There was full compliance, with no customers smoking inside the public houses following the introduction of the ban. The ban has been good for the industry, staff, and customers.

M McCaffrey,^{1,2}
PG Goodman,¹
K Kelleher,³
L Clancy⁴

Dublin Institute of
Technology,¹ Health
Service Executive,²
University College
Dublin,³ Research
Institute for a
Tobacco Free Society
All Dublin⁴

INTRODUCTION

On the 29th March 2004 the Irish Government, introduced the first national comprehensive legislation banning the consumption of tobacco products in the workplace.¹ This ban included restaurants and public houses. There was a concerted media campaign by the hospitality industry against the introduction of a comprehensive ban, claiming among other things that there would be major job losses within the industry.² As part of this study the number of customers, staff, and the number of people smoking in a selection of Dublin pubs were recorded during visits before and after the introduction of the smoking ban to determine the effect ban on bar occupancy, staffing numbers, and on smoking levels.

METHODOLOGY

In the period between October 2003 and March 2004, 38 Dublin public houses were visited for the pre-ban period of this research project. All of these pubs were still trading when were re-visited exactly one year later, with the follow-up visits taking place

on the same month of the year, on the same day of the week and at the same time of day as the pre-ban visits. This was to control for the time of day, day of the week and season effects.

Each visit lasted for a minimum of three hours, the number of customers, the number of staff, and the number of people smoking was recorded on arrival, at one-hourly intervals, and at the time of departure. Special events such as major sporting matches, concerts etc were taken into account during the analysis. The data were analysed using a paired t-test. The average number of customers was calculated for each venue for each visit. The data collected to determine the number of smokers were similarly collected and analysed, where smokers inside the public house were counted in the pre-ban period, and customers smoking outside the public house were counted for the post-ban period.

SAMPLE SELECTION

In the greater metropolitan area of Dublin, a group of 38 public houses, licensed to serve alcohol, were studied. These venues encompassed a variety

of building structures, clientele and geographic location. As far as possible, the aim was to achieve a representative cross-sample of the variety of public houses found in Dublin city.

Fifteen were located on the north city suburbs, 13 were located on the south city suburbs and 10 were located in the city centre. Nineteen were characterised as large (capacity >50 customers) and 19 were characterised as small (capacity <50 customers).

RESULTS

STAFF LEVELS

The number of bar staff working in each of the public houses was recorded. Across the 38 public houses, there was a total of 129 staff recorded in the pre-ban period and 118 in the post-ban period, this represents a reduction of 8.53%. The average pre ban number of staff per public house was 3.4 (sd=1.58), with a post ban average of staff of 3.1 (SD=1.27) ($p = 0.176$) Table 1. Ten public houses showed an increase in staff levels post ban, 15 public houses showed no change and 13 showed a decrease in staff levels post ban. (The information is presented graphically in Figure 1.)

CUSTOMER OCCUPANCY LEVELS

Across all 38 public houses, the number of customers present in the public house were recorded and analysed to determine if there was any significant change as a consequence of the smoking ban. The number of customers pre ban averaged 59 (SD=46) and post ban 66 (SD=48.7). This represents an overall increase of 11% ($p=0.060$) in the number of people attending the public houses.

SMOKING INSIDE/OUTSIDE PUBS

The number of people smoking in each public house was recorded simultaneously, as described for the pub occupancy data. The number of smokers was expressed as a percentage of the number of customers present in the public house. In the pre-ban period 17.2% of customers were smoking, ranging from 5% to 51%. In the post ban period no customer was smoking inside the premises, so the number of customers smoking outside the public house was recorded and used as the data for customers smoking in the post ban period. The post-ban smoking levels averaged 3.82%, ranging from 0% to 20%. This represents a decrease of 77.8% ($p= 0.001$) in the number of customers smoking while visiting public houses, coincident with the introduction of the smoking ban.

DISCUSSION

In Ireland, prior to the introduction of the smoking ban, interested parties formed the 'Irish Hospitality Industry Alliance' (IHIA) to co-ordinate an opposition campaign, arguing that the impending ban would interfere with civil liberties, would interfere with the 'social fabric of society', would have a negative economic impact, and would not be properly enforced. They also predicted that up to 64,200 jobs would be lost in the hospitality industry following the introduction of a smoking ban.² Of the 38 public houses included in this study, an 8.82% decrease was observed in staff numbers, while at the same time an increase in the number of customers was observed, neither of these changes is statistically significant. The Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) publishes quarterly, seasonally adjusted employment figures for the hospitality industry.³ These figures show that for the quarter September/November 2003, there were 115.8K employees in the industry, this fell to 110.6K by June/August 2004, increased to 112.9K by September/November 2004, and had returned to 115.7K by September/November 2005. These CSO figures showed a 4.5% drop in the seasonally adjusted employment in the industry after the introduction of the ban, but this fall had decreased to 2.5% within six months, and had returned to pre-ban levels by the third quarter of 2005. The results from this study, and from the CSO data, show that there was no significant decrease in employment in the hospitality industry in Ireland as a result of the introduction of the smoking ban. The CSO³ also provide specific figures for those employed in pubs, in the six months immediately prior to the smoking ban these averaged 23.55 thousand staff over the whole country, this had fallen to 22.5 thousand (-4.5%) a year later, identical to the trend in the wider hospitality industry. By the end of 2005 the CSO figures show that employment figures in pubs had returned to the pre smoking ban levels.

From the 38 public houses involved in this Dublin study, the vast majority show either no change or an increase in customer numbers in the post smoking ban period compared to the pre-ban period.

Fong et al⁴ (2006), reported from an International telephone survey of active smokers which included 679 Irish smokers, approximately 34% of whom reported spending less time in public houses, 64% reported spending the same amount of time, and 2% reported spending more time. Again the findings from Fong et al⁴ are consistent with other reports:-

Table 1
RESULTS

	PRE BAN AVERAGE	POST BAN AVERAGE	% CHANGE (P VALUE)
Average Staff Levels	3.4 (sd=1.58) (Range: 1 to 9)	3.1 (sd=1.27) (Range: 1 to 6)	8.82% decrease (p= 0.176)
Customer Numbers	59 (sd=46) (Range: 15 to 205)	66 (sd=48.7) (Range: 15 to 214)	11% increase (p=0.060)
% of Customers Smoking	17.2% (sd=10.01) (Range: 5 to 51)	3.82 (sd=3.71) (Range: 0 to 20)	77.8% decrease (p=0.000)

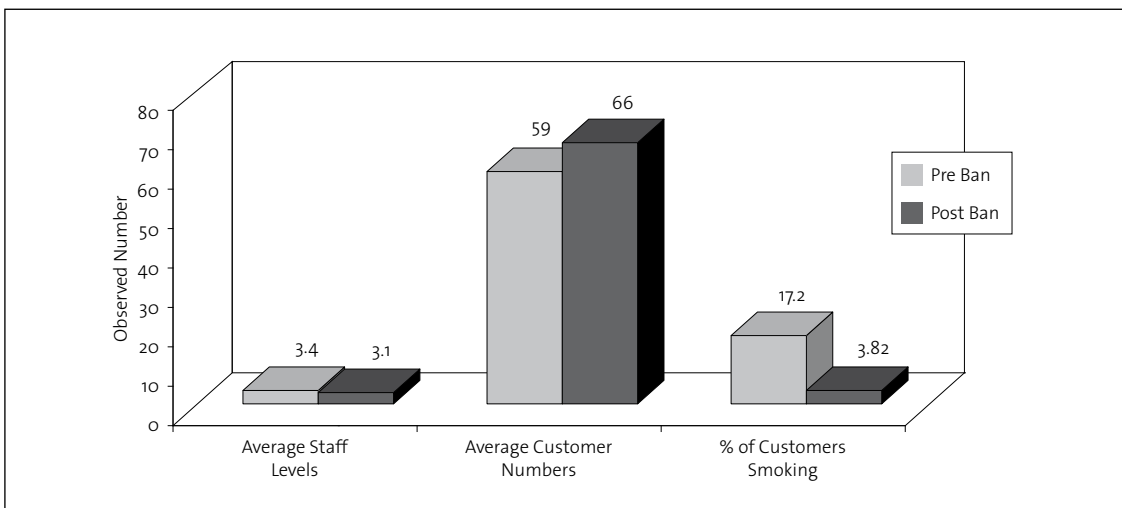


Figure 1 —
RESULTS

An Irish survey conducted in January 2004 (OTC),⁵ just before the ban was introduced, found that 13% of respondents said they would visit bars more often for a drink once the ban was introduced and 12% said they would visit less often. Interestingly, 20% said they would visit smoke-free bars more often for a meal compared to 7% who said they would visit less often. Biener and Fitzgerald⁶ have documented that many individuals avoid restaurants and bars because of ETS. Novick⁷ argues convincingly that smoke-free dining areas do not impose economic hardship on proprietors while protecting worker and public health.

Repeated surveys throughout 2003 (OTC, TNS/MRBI surveys)⁸ showed a consistent majority, of approximately 70% of the Irish population, supporting a ban on smoking in the workplace. Encouragingly, a large proportion of current smokers also supported the ban and was optimistic that such a ban would make it easier for smokers to quit.

There has been a decrease in the number of people smoking from 31% of the Irish population in 1998 to 27% in 2002,⁹ and in 2005¹⁰ have decreased further to

approximately 24%. Eight out of 10 smokers want to quit and in the past many tried repeatedly, but failed mainly because they were unsupported.¹¹ Smokers who are employed in workplaces with smoking bans are more likely to consume fewer cigarettes per day, are more likely to consider quitting, and quit at an increased rate compared with smokers employed in workplaces with no or weaker policies.¹²

Fong et al⁴ reported that among Irish smokers who had quit post ban, 80% reported that the law had helped them quit and 88% reported that the law helped them remain non-smokers. Interestingly, that study also found that the number of Irish homes with smoking bans also increased.

CONCLUSIONS

This work has shown that there was a small decrease in the number of staff employed in the 38 premises when the pre and post smoking ban periods were compared. It has also shown that there was an overall increase in pub occupancy rates, with 13 out of the 38 pubs showing an increase in occupancy and only six showing a decrease.

The Irish workplace smoking ban has been very successful at reducing smoking among pub customers, where a decrease of 77.8% was found. Demonstrating that the ban, apart from achieving its main aim of improving air quality for bar staff and customers, has resulted in a substantial reduction in smoking bar customers through providing a supportive environment to help smokers abstain. This work also clearly demonstrates that a total workplace-smoking ban is good for public health, and the hospitality industry.

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Ethics Approval was granted by the St James/ Federated Dublin Hospitals Joint Ethics Committee.

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Correspondence to: Prof Luke Clancy, Director General Research Institute for a Tobacco Free Society, The Digital Depot, Thomas Street, Dublin 8, Ireland Tel +353 1 4893638; Fax +353 1 4893640 email: lclancy@tri.ie Website: www.tri.ie