

April 2006

Smoke-Free Workplaces: Not Just for Nonsmokers

The Issue

As of May 31, 2006, all enclosed workplaces in Ontario will be smoke-free. While this provision of the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act* is being enacted to protect the health of nonsmokers, research suggests that it will also benefit smokers. Judging by studies on this issue from Canada,^{1,2} the United States,^{3,4} Australia,³ and Ireland,⁵ the new restrictions on public smoking will likely encourage smokers to cut down on their smoking, quit, and stay off cigarettes permanently. This update provides new evidence from Ontario that supports the international consensus on this issue.

Data Sources

We analyzed the survey responses collected in 2003 from Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey. Employed Ontario residents aged 20 and over (n=18,344) reported whether smoking at work was completely banned, partially restricted, or completely unregulated; they also described their smoking status. Daily smokers (n=4,154) reported how much they smoked daily.

Findings

There is a very strong association between workplace smoking bans and smoking:

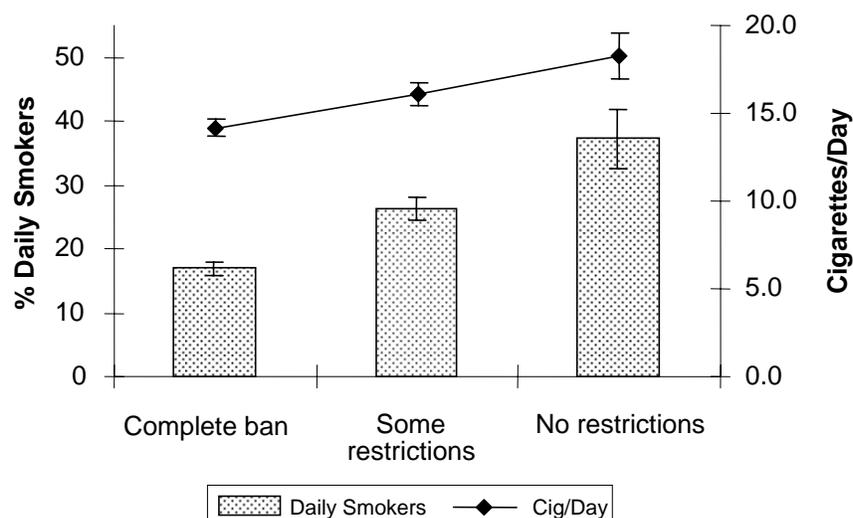
- Ontarians who work where there are no restrictions are *more than twice as likely* to be daily smokers (37%) as those who work where smoking is completely banned (17%) (see figure, bars).
- When there are partial restrictions on smoking at work (e.g., designated smoking areas), the prevalence of daily smoking (26%) falls between that associated with complete bans (17%), and no restrictions (37%).

Similarly, daily smokers smoke significantly less when restrictions on workplace smoking are tighter (see figure, line).

- Daily smokers employed in workplaces with a complete ban report smoking, on average, 14.1 cigarettes—4.2 fewer cigarettes than when smoking is unrestricted.
- Again, the number of cigarettes smoked by workers with partial smoking restrictions on the job falls in the middle (16.1 cigarettes/day).

These associations are independent of employee age, gender, education, and occupation.

Smoking Status and Amount Smoked Daily, by Smoking Restrictions at Work, Ontario Employees Aged 20+, 2003



Note: Vertical lines represent 95% confidence intervals.

Source: CCHS

Discussion

These findings for Ontario are consistent with a large number of studies from other places.^{1-4,6,7} Overall, the results are clear: banning smoking in the workplace not only improves indoor air quality at work, but is also strongly associated with less smoking among employees generally. Evidence indicates that compensatory smoking in off-work hours does not appear to be associated with banning smoking. Moreover, reduced daily consumption generally precedes eventual quitting.⁷ Workplace smoking bans are beneficial for nonsmokers and smokers alike.

References

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