Reviewer's report

Title: Is there an impact of public smoking bans on self-reported smoking status and exposure to secondhand smoke? Do smoking bans decrease exposure?

Version: 1 Date: 7 October 2010

Reviewer: Alessandro Barchielli

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This paper investigates the impact of public smoking bans on secondhand smoke and on individual smoking behaviour resulting from two surveys. Authors concluded that the implementation of full smoking ban reduced secondhand smoke exposure, whereas partial bans have inconsistent effects. This is an important message from a public health point of view. In my knowledge many papers evaluated the effects of smoking bans on health status (i.e. hospitalization for cardiovascular events), but few articles analysed the effects on smoke exposures. Nevertheless, some aspects should be better pointed-out to and clearly stated to improve the presentation and conclusions.

Major compulsory revisions.

1. For a better comparison of the results of the two surveys, authors should add (to the analysis stratified by municipalities reported in table 4) a pooled analysis by type of ban modification performed with proper statistical methods, i.e. classifying groups of municipalities as:
   - no charge to existing partial ban;
   - no charge to existing full ban;
   - strengthening of existing full ban;
   - introduction of full ban from previous partial ban;
   - introduction of partial ban from no previous ban;
   - introduction of full ban from no previous ban.

Besides, the main conclusion (“Implementation of a full smoking ban was associated with the largest decreases in secondhand smoke exposure while partial bans and changes in existing bans had inconsistent effects”) is partially in contrast with results of figure 4, showing similar effects between the “Introduction of Partial Ban from No Previous Ban” and the “Introduction of Full Ban from Previous Partial Ban”.

2. This paper needs to be extensively edited. The following sentences are examples of unclear writing:

ABSTRACT:

“The last three municipalities to implement smoking bans had the highest rates of
personal smoking in 2003”

INTRODUCTION:
“Our main objective was to determine whether smoking bans and the type of smoking ban directly impact rates of SHS exposure in public places and rates of complete workplace smoking also influence the number of current smokers and if they shift smoking from public places towards private settings.”

Objectives of the study should better explained

METHODS:
“Ethics approval was sought but not required as public access files of the survey were used.”

RESULTS
“…the ability to smoke at work “
“…by the completion of the 2005 survey.”

DISCUSSION
“…as vehicles as smokers have fewer options for where they can smoke.”

Minor essential revisions.

1. Results, first paragraph. Why authors present data on influenza vaccination rates? Besides, the rates reported in table 1 (range: 34.3%-46.0%) are quite different across areas.

2. Results, paragraph beginning with “Figure 4 shows…”, fourth and fifth sentences. Rates of complete smoking restriction at work in 2005 vs. 2003 are similar or the decrease was statistically significant? The two messages are conflicting.

3. Discussion, last sentences. Authors should explain why the 2000-2001 survey could not be used: the unique item of this survey (“the 2000-20001 survey contained one question about SHS exposure”) is comparable or not with items of the subsequent surveys?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests