Author's response to reviews

Title: Before and after study of bar workers' perceptions of the impact of smoke-free workplace legislation in the Republic of Ireland

Authors:

Lisa Pursell (lisa.pursell@nuigalway.ie)
Shane Allwright (sllwrght@tcd.ie)
Diarmaid O'Donovan (diarmuid.odonovan@nuigalway.ie)
Gillian Paul (gpaul@tcd.ie)
Alan Kelly (akelly@tcd.ie)
Bernie J Mullally (b.mullally@ucc.ie)
Maureen D'Eath (maureen.death@nuigalway.ie)

Version: 4 Date: 5 March 2007

Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer's report
Title: Before and after study of bar workers' perceptions of the impact of smoke-free workplace legislation in the Republic of Ireland
Version: 3
Date: 12 January 2007
Reviewer: George Thomson

General
The article appears to have largely dealt with the reviewers comments in a suitable way, with some considerable improvements. There appears sufficient and appropriate economic context and discussion in the Discussion section.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

1) The Abstract still does not appear to sufficiently acknowledge the non-random nature of a large part of the sample (the word ‘volunteered’ only covers one aspect of the non-randomness, and blurs the distinction between the Cork and other sample). At a minimum, I suggest the addition of words in the abstract (Participants) : eg. ‘From a largely non-random selection, 288 bar workers volunteered for the baseline …’

This phrase has now been added to the Abstract (Participants) section.

 Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

2) The Results first sentence reads:
In total 207 bar workers were enrolled at baseline from 139 in pubs in Galway and Cork and 81 were enrolled in Dublin from Mandate Trade Union.
I assume it should read ‘139 pubs’. Also, it would be clearer if it read ‘and Cork, and a further 81 …’

Typo corrected and wording amended as suggested.

3) In p.3, para 2, line 6, 'November 2004' should read 'December 2004'.

Month corrected.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

4) It would help to have the URL for references 14 & 29.

URLs added to these references (now numbered 15 & 25)

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
No except previously undertaken contract work for not-for-profit organisations involved in tobacco control.
Reviewer's report

Title: Before and after study of bar workers' perceptions of the impact of smoke-free workplace legislation in the Republic of Ireland

Version: 3

Date: 23 January 2007

Reviewer: Stanton Glantz

Reviewer's report:

General

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

While somewhat improved from the previous version, the fact is that few readers will make the distinction between PERCEIVED adverse economic impacts and ACTUAL economic impacts.

The stated aim of our study was to examine the perceived impacts of the ban. We have made more explicit the distinction between perceived and actual impacts within the text and feel readers cannot confuse them unless determined to do so.

The authors still imply that there were actual negative short term economic impacts.

We believe that our text neutrally reports that there was a decline in volume sales starting 3 years before the ban and that this decline continued at exactly the same rate for one year after the ban and then started to rise. The text is carefully worded so as to avoid implying attribution to the smoke-free legislation.

As I see it, there are two options:

1. Add an analysis of the actual economic impact (which, based on the added material will probably either be nil or positive) and make the point that, as elsewhere, the perceptions did not match reality (or, if it turns out that there was a negative impact, that perceptions did match reality).

As argued previously, a thorough review of the economic changes using objective outcome measures before and after the ban and an analysis of the highly complex reasons for such changes are required for Ireland but we feel such an analysis would be well beyond the scope of a survey of attitudes and perceptions. However, we have further amended para 4 of the Discussion which presents data from the Irish Central Statistics Office and text which clearly indicates that any downturn preceded the ban by 3 years and that this downturn now seems to be reversing itself. And we have cited Scollo’s paper pointing out the increased likelihood of negative trends when subjective data are used as outcomes and cited the need for a full scale economic analysis for the Republic using objective data (last 2 paragraphs of Discussion). We have downplayed the economic impacts throughout as far as we consider it scientifically reasonable to do. We have also amended the text in the Abstract (Abstract Results, paragraph 3) to emphasize that regardless of study participants’ views on whether the ban would have a negative economic impact, the majority agreed, both before and especially after the ban, that the ban was needed to protect bar workers’ health. We suggest that bar workers in other jurisdictions will be equally persuaded by the health argument. In fact, tobacco control colleagues in Northern Ireland are very keen to use this finding to advocate for their ban (due
30/4) and to support their hospitality workers. We are anxious for the study to be published in time to provide this support, and similarly for Wales and England.

The situation in Ireland may differ from the U.S. experience. Indeed there is a trend in Europe generally away from pub sales to off license sales, a trend that preceded the introduction of smoke-free legislation in any European countries. Several objective indices would be required for a full economic analysis including, for example, sales of pubs (which show a gloomy picture for rural pubs - although for reasons largely unrelated to the smoking legislation). As predicted in an economic assessment commissioned by the Irish Office of Tobacco Control prior to implementation, at an aggregated level the ban appears to have had little or no affect on the trade. However micro-market data indicate considerable change happening as a result of the ban. As you can see from the attached articles, (Irish Times 17/03/05 & 23/02/07 and Drinks industry Ireland 31/07/06, appended to this document), the reasons for changes in the fortunes of the pub trade (some up and some down) in Ireland are many and complex and relate to wide-ranging changes in the fabric of Irish life over the past ten years. We elected, after discussions with tobacco control colleagues, to cite trends in pub retail volume and value sales to illustrate what has been happening in the pub trade as this is the most commonly cited economic index and clearly indicated that the downward trends in volume sales preceded the ban.

As an aside, we have changed wherever possible our usage of the word ‘ban’ (favoured by the tobacco industry) to ‘legislation’.

2. Delete the material on economic impact and present it later, when it can be done in proper context.

The perceptions of economic impacts were not defined by the study researchers but were informed by the public consultations that had occurred in various locations within the Republic of Ireland prior to the implementation of the legislation. In this respect they form an integral part of the study and we feel that to remove them would constitute a dishonouring of the data. We also believe that we would be severely criticized by readers subsequent to publication for leaving out reference to what was the dominant concern prior to the legislation and to what is a concern to other jurisdictions implementing similar legislation.

Option 1 would be better, because it would provide a more complete picture of the data. Option 2 would be acceptable, because it would avoid presenting a MISLEADING picture of reality.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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.
Rural pubs are closing at a rate of more than one a day as drinkers move their custom to urban bars and off-licences, new figures show.

Almost 440 fewer pub licences were issued or renewed last year compared to 2005, according to the figures compiled by the Revenue Commissioners. This is the steepest decline ever recorded.

The Vintners' Federation of Ireland (VFI) responded to the figures yesterday by calling on the Government to give rates relief to rural pubs and reductions in vehicle registration tax for members who provide transport for their customers.

"Small post offices are gone, corner shops have been decimated and even the church is suffering a shortage of priests. Now the last bastion of rural Ireland where people interact socially is under threat," said Paul Stevenson, president of the VFI.

The biggest falls were recorded in the Border, Midlands and Western (BMW) counties, where 227 pub licences were lost, and in counties Kerry, Cork, Clare and Limerick, where licences fell by 130.

In contrast, Dublin lost just 10 licences and the rest of Leinster 70.

While pub numbers are plummeting, the off-licence trade is booming.

There were 46 additional off-licences in Munster last year, 155 in Leinster and 46 in Dublin.

In the BMW region, however, the number of off-licences fell by 40.

Vintners' groups have been warning about the difficulties faced by rural pubs since the smoking ban was introduced in 2004 and random breath-testing started last year.

However, these figures are even worse than they predicted, as the opening of new pubs in urban centres is partly offset by a bigger fall in pub licences in rural areas.

"The number of rural pubs closing is even greater than was thought," said Constance Cassidy SC, an expert on licensing law.

"However, there has been a redistribution of licences in accordance with public demand, rather than any being lost.

"People want to drink at home, or in hotels."

Although drink licensing has been liberalised in recent years, it is still necessary to extinguish one drinks licence to create another.

Many rural pub licences are being bought by business interests who use the permit to open an urban pub or off-licence.

Demand has been particularly heavy from convenience stores which need a licence to sell beer.

Another trend has seen up to 40 per cent of pub sales, particularly in high-value urban areas, go to developers who seek to build apartments on the site.

According to Ms Cassidy, the market price for a pub licence is about €175,000-€185,000, compared to about €85,000 in 2000.

The counties suffering the greatest loss of pubs are Mayo, which lost 91 licences last year, and Galway, down by 55. Limerick had 43 fewer licences, Kerry 33, Clare 29, Tipperary 27 and Cork 25.

Overall, there are about 8,500 pubs in the State.
Changing Irish On- and Off-Trades – An ACNielsen Study

Although there has been a great deal of publicity around the smoking ban introduced in March 2004, it had little overall effect on the downward trend in volumes, claims ACNielsen's Tom Harpur. Here, he summarises the trends in the licensed trade over the past five years and suggests what has really been affecting the on-trade - pricing.

The last five years have seen dramatic change in the drinks industry in Ireland. One of the most significant shifts has been the move from on-trade sales to off-trade sales. Today, 27 per cent of alcohol sales are through off-licences versus 16 per cent five years ago. This trend is likely to continue into the years ahead. This kind of dynamic consumer change causes huge movement in the behaviour of the industry. For example, manufacturers divert more resources internally to the off-trade sector while different views to on-trade promotions and advertising emerge and there is change by the trade in reaction to the increased home consumption.

Differences between consumer behaviour in the on- and off-trade are further illustrated in Chart One with the top-selling beers in both sectors. The off-trade brand choice by consumers clearly shows the market as price-sensitive with low-priced brands such as Dutch Gold in high demand. Also notice that stout holds three places in the top 10 brands in the on-trade compared to the off-trade where only one stout brand makes it into the top 10 as lager dominates sales. There is also price-sensitivity in the on-trade sector as we will see below.

The shift toward off-trade consumption has been caused by a number of factors such as demographic changes, more compliance with drink-driving laws and changes in attitudes to drink by the general population. One of the most important factors however has been the price in the on-trade. Chart Two illustrates the effects of higher prices in pubs over a
five-year period. This Chart takes the month of January 2001 and sets price and volume of beer sold equal to 100 creating an index. The price index measures the price inflation of beer and the volume index tracks the percentage movement of beer consumed in pubs over the period.

![Chart Two]

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The price and volume of sales indices for beer in the on-trade was steady throughout 2001. The introduction of the €uro however seems to have started an inflationary period in pubs around January 2002 and as a result the volume started to decline and continues to decline month after month only stabilising in 2005.

Although there has been a great deal of publicity around the smoking ban introduced in March 2004, Chart Two demonstrates that it had little effect on the downward trend in volumes. At an aggregated level this would suggest that the ban had no affect on the trade. When we dive into the micro-market data however we find quite a bit of change happening as a result of the ban.

For example, in the early days of the smoking ban pubs with no outdoor seating suffered large month-on-month declines in sales, some as much as 20 per cent per month. Other pubs with outdoor seating and especially those pubs with covered outdoor seating showed no decline and in some cases even growth. The reaction by publicans can be seen all around the country even today with many pubs entering into some kind of outdoor refurbishment.

Another interesting finding from our smoking ban study was the change in lager price sensitivity. After the ban the lager volumes in the on-trade became slightly less sensitive to price changes. That is, relative price increases/decreases on lager had a smaller affect on volumes sold. This may be due to the fact that consumers going to the pub are more loyal than the consumer mix before the ban. Although this may be good news for some
publicans, it could also be bad news for the pubs that have lost customers due to the outdoor seating issue.

Our study also found that sales of spirits - and to a lesser degree wine - were more negatively impacted than beers. Sales of gin and rum in particular seem to have declined more than any other sector as a result of the ban. In addition, the price elasticities of these products have also been changed as a result of the introduction of the smoking ban.

There is no doubt that the smoking ban has caused an economic shock to the on-trade and off-trade markets. The industry, even two years later, continues to react to this external economic shock. The ban however has not been as impactful as consumers' longer-term reaction to price inflation or indeed the changing demographic and culture lifestyle shifts of the Irish population over the recent years.

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The January sales period delivered only modest growth in retail sales despite retailers claims to have reduced their prices, new figures suggest.
The figures also indicate that bar sales volumes continued to fall in January in marked contrast to a 5.3 per cent rise in the volume of sales in all sectors of the economy in the same period. Ibec affiliate Retail Ireland said the retail figures were disappointing. It said price increases for electricity, gas and waste disposal were a matter of concern because sales volumes increased by only 2.8 per cent in the year to the end of January when motor sales were excluded.
The volume of bar sales fell 6.1 per cent in the year to the end of January, continuing a trend that began in 2003.
Goodbody economist Dermot O'Leary said the downward trend appeared to have continued from where it left off in 2004 when sales volumes fell 4.5 per cent for the year and noted that volumes fell by a similar amount in 2003.
Mr O'Leary blamed excessive inflationary pressure in the last number of years for the fall-off in bar sales.
"While publicans will claim that this was mainly due to the ban on smoking in the workplace, the fact remains that bar sales volumes were on a downward path long before this time."
The Central Statistics Office figures said the value of retail sales rose 6.3 per cent in January compared with January 2004 and rose 1.9 per cent in the month. When motor trades were excluded, the annual increase was 3.2 per cent and January sales were down by 0.2 per cent compared with the previous month.
Department stores had the biggest increase in the volume of sales in the October-December period last year, rising by 3.7 per cent compared with the July-September period.
The biggest decrease between the same periods was a 6.3 per cent fall in electrical goods sales.
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