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: 2 Date: 10 September 2006

Reviewer: George Thomson

Reviewer's report:

General
A generally well designed study and well written article, of considerable and value interest to health policymakers. The question posed (what is the support for and perceptions of bar workers before and after smokefree bar legislation) is relatively new, and results outside of New Zealand do not appear to have published.

I cannot generally comment on the statistical issues.

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

1) A clearer picture of the recruitment process is needed.

In providing a minimal description of the recruitment process, and relying on reference to Allwright et al 2005 (Allwright), the article risks leaving unanswered questions. In particular, (i) it is not clear from Allwright whether all family-owned pubs were selected in Galway electoral districts with populations of less than 1500, how workers were selected within those pubs, and what the response rate was, (ii) how and why ‘family-owned’ was defined (iii) what proportion of the survey the Cork workers were (relevant, because the randomness of their selection is used to argue for the validity of the whole study), and (iv) how the Cork workers were selected within each pub, and what the response rate was (including the number of pubs where one worker and two workers were recruited).

The figures for workers at the start of the project ‘207 from 140 pubs and 81 from Mandate’ are rather buried in Figure 1 of Allwright, and it would help to have them in the methods section of the new article.

2) A statement of the non-random nature of most of the survey participants is needed in the abstract and the methods sections, as well as in the discussion. This would make the standard of the data much more transparent and useful for readers of the article, rather than readers finding this out right at the article’s end.

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

3) Abstract: To make it easier for readers, the second paragraph needs to be clearer - eg. ¾ ‘agreed to three positive statements about the legislation, with increases to ….’ (this also applies to the first line of Results - Perceived impacts.)

4) Background (3rd para) and discussion (comparison): If the statements ‘few studies’ and ‘no studies’ is going to be made, then some recognition of the Milne and Guenole study of bar managers, pre and post the New Zealand ban, could be made. Data from the study was used in ‘Thomson G, Wilson N. One year of smokefree bars and restaurants in New Zealand: Impacts and responses. BMC Public Health 2006, 6:64.’ And the Milne study has been available at: http://www.hsc.org.nz/pdfs/BMS-Report-to-MOH-May.pdf since May 2006.

5) Discussion: Comparison with other studies - It would help if reference 13 (Tang et al) was mentioned here once, as the first mention gives the impression that Tang did not focus on bar workers.
6) There is not a clear section for the policy implications of the study, and no clear policy discussion anywhere. At least a minimal discussion is essential. For instance, is there a greater need to provide the hospitality sector with more intensive factual information, to avoid misconceptions? (Because the sector is such a crucial one in the process of gaining and implementing smokefree bar legislation).

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

7) Abstract: The last sentence is too long and complicated, and would be better split in two.

8) Background:
   First para, first sentence - I assume that the authors mean ‘In response to factors including the evidence on …’

9) Second para, first sentence - the para appears to be about impacts within customers and the public, as well as within bar owners and staff.


11) It would also help to summarise briefly the pre-ban perceptions - eg, fear of financial loss.

12) Results or discussion: Some statistically inclined readers may be interested in any possible cluster effect of having more than one worker per pub.

13) Discussion
   In the first para, the point of the results could be added to by a sentence pointing out that the increased overall support is despite an increased perception of some negative aspects.

14) In the two paragraphs on negative perceptions, it would help if there was a little discussion on what the contextual information means - ie - does this indicate that the sample group had misperceptions?

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

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes

Declaration of competing interests:
I have undertaken contract work for a range of organisations involved in tobacco control including: ASH NZ, NZ Cancer Society, NZ Heart Foundation, NZ Smokefree Coalition, the Quit Group and the NZ Ministry of Health.