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: 20 October 2006

Reviewer: Stanton Glantz

Reviewer's report:

General

This paper reports the results of a small (n=288) survey of bar workers in Ireland after a smokefree law went into effect. It shows generally strong (and growing) support for the law. It also shows growing perception that the law led to negative economic effects, but that this perception did not undermine support for the idea of protecting bar workers from secondhand smoke.

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

The discussion of economic effects of the law needs substantial additional work. The fact that the authors found PERCEPTIONS of negative economic effects is not surprising, given the massive propoganda effort that the tobacco industry has run for years on this point (see, for example, Tobacco Control 2002;11:94-104). Objective assessment of the actual effects of these laws has not confirmed this perception (Tobacco Control 2003;12:13-20). Given the centrality of this economic argument and the widespread misconception of the effects of these laws on bar economics, the fact that the authors did not carefully address the actual effects is a severe limitation of the paper and one that will greatly increase the chance that it will be represented as having DEMONSTRATED an adverse economic effect. The authors touch on the issue of actual effects when they cite two sets of statistics (refs 20 and 21), but these are raw data sources, not analyses. It is also hard to imagine that the smokefree law (which went into effect in March 2004) would account for declines beginning in 2002. The authors also report an increases in business in 2005. This entire presentation is superficial and confusing. The authors have the data (and the statistical capability) to present a proper analysis of the actual economic effects to demonstrate whether or not the preceptions were supported by reality or a reflection of underlying secular trends (as they imply). They need to do the necessary analysis. The paper cited by Scollo et al outlines the criterial for doing such an analysis properly.

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

None.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

In summarizing the health benefits of smokefree policies, the authors should cite the recent report in JAMA that smokefree bars were associated with improvements in respiratory function in bar workers in Scotland (JAMA. 2006;296:1742-1748). There are also papers indicating a reduction in heart attacks associated with these laws in Helena Montana (British Medical Journal 2004; 328: 977 - 980), Pueblo Colorado (Circulation 2006; 114: 1490 – 1496) and Italy (Eur. Heart J., 2006; 27: 2468 – 2472)

There are a lot of places where the authors used double negatives, which makes the paper hard to follow. For example, on page 5, "those who did not agree that the ban would have a negative effect on business ...". I suggest getting rid of all the double negative statements.

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

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests