Reviewer’s report

Title: Observations from behind the bar: changing patrons behaviours in response to smoke-free legislation in Scotland

Version: 1 Date: 8 January 2008

Reviewer: George Thomson

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Minir essential revisions

1) In the last para of the introduction, it would be helpful if there was a sentence or so on other relevant work, so as to substantiate the assertion in the first sentence of the para. While it may be the first such study in Scotland, what is the relevant research elsewhere? It may aid readers grasp of the field that is covered if some of the other qualitative literature on smoking and smokefree bars is discussed. Examples include:

Moore RS, Lee JP, Antin TM, Martin SE. Tobacco free workplace policies and low socioeconomic status female bartenders in San Francisco.
J Epidemiol Community Health. 2006 Sep;60 Suppl 2:51-6.

A new publication, which may have occurred after any final scan of the literature, is:

Health Promot Pract. 2007 Oct 9;

In the Discussion section, it may be helpful to readers is to compare the issues that arose from qualitative interviews in Scotland, with those that arose in other places with smokefree bar laws.

2) The crucial second sentence of the para, giving the aims of the study, could be improved by being split in two (general aim, then particular objectives). It is not clear why the two particular objectives were chosen. If bar staff are seen as the best available reporters on changes in patrons behaviour, then this should be argued (and the quality of the reporting discussed in the Discussion section). The health and/or policy significance for smokefree law implementation, of challenges to bar staff, may need to be spelt out. How do such challenges relate to compliance with the law, and public support for it?

3) The authors should state why 12 interviews were carried out â## was this to do with resources, was it because the interview content was becoming repetitive by 12, or some other reason? The consequences of this number need to be discussed in the Discussion section (which would be improved by a distinct
Was the time distance from the law change to the interviews a factor—what were the advantages and disadvantages of the time distance? Should follow-up work be done later, when social patterns are clearer?

4) There appears to be a greater need for the provision of context in the discussion. This context is given for smirting, but not for the two issues highlighted at the bottom of page 9, social isolation of older male smokers, and spiking.

Some context is essential to indicate the relevance and relative importance of spiking. Readers in places where spiking is not a public issue will need to know the potential relevance of the issue for them. This context could include the extent to which perceived levels of spiking have changed over the last 5-10 years (ie, is this a perception that has increased due to other factors), and the extent that the levels have changed since March 2006. Are the perceptions objectively verifiable, and what work has been done to verify them? To what extent has the issue been driven by opponents of smokefree laws?

If media mentions are used (eg):

Another week in Scotland's upmarket bars - and 2 women will claim to be 'drug-raped'
Michael Howie, 5 March 2007, The Scotsman p.2

Spiked drinks risk warning to smokers
25 March 2006, Evening Times, p.7

Then a critical examination of them will be necessary.

5) Much of the second para on p.10 appears to be pointing towards recommendations to further research. It may be helpful to make clear whether further qualitative research on how patrons or public feel about the changing experience of public smoking is needed, and if so, what particular research priorities there are (beyond those in the 2nd to last sentence of the para, and in the conclusions).

A usual recommendation from qualitative research is for quantitative research to help establish if the issues that arose with a small sample are true at statistically significant levels. For instance, is the concern with spiking present across all areas and types of bars?

6) It is unclear what the policy implications of the research are (beyond those in the last para before the Conclusions). For instance, is greater cessation help to older men needed?

Discretionary Revisions
The authors may wish to have clearer Limitations, Policy Implications and Further research sections in the Discussion.
There is an occasional tendency to over-long sentences (eg; last one before "Concerns about patrons' safety" heading; 2nd to last in 2nd para, p.10; the last sentence in the Findings part of the Abstract).

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential 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'