

Free essay on smoking bans in public places

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This essay discusses the bans on smoking in public places that have been introduced in recent times in many countries of the world. Depending on the individual country, the ban may be either nationwide or determined by state or region within that country. The reason I believe such bans are so important is to reduce the numbers of deaths from cancer, which has long been known to be directly linked with smoking, including the effects of secondary inhalation of tobacco smoke, known as “passive smoking”. According to the CBC News website, quoting the World Health Organization (WHO), some 1.3 billion people around the world currently use tobacco, of which half will die from smoking-related problems. Although they say that the number of smokers in the USA is decreasing, that is not the case in other countries where smoking is actually on the increase. The WHO estimates that passive smoking alone is responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths annually.

Although these bans on smoking in public places can only be beneficial in health terms, there are of course other points of view, especially from people who are smokers themselves and/or those who earn a living that may be affected by these smoking bans. Whilst I support the smoking bans, I can understand there are other views and will include those arguments in this essay.

But who are the obvious people who support smoking bans? Firstly, supporters for bans on smoking in public places, particularly in enclosed spaces like restaurants, bars, offices, stores, theatres, etc, must include virtually all non-smokers like me. I have no wish whatsoever to share other people’s smoke, for example if I am having a meal, or watching a show at

the theater or cinema. Some of the stronger tobacco blends actually cause me breathing difficulties if I am close by the smoker – what must it be doing to that person's own lungs?! Have you ever been to a party or other similar function where there are a lot of smokers present? When you get home (in your clean, tobacco-free environment) your clothes and your hair simply reek of stale tobacco smoke. A shower soon fixes the smelly hair but all your clothes will need laundering to rid them of that awful odor.

Another group who generally support smoking bans (even though many of their number smoke themselves) are the health professionals – doctors, nurses, and so on. They see the effects of smoking firsthand in their hospitals, often ending with the painful deaths of the patients with terminal lung cancer. According to an article by Longley, (2005), smoking-related deaths in the USA cost circa \$92 billion every year (1997-2001) in lost productivity and a further \$75. 5 billion in associated health care costs (1998). The report quoted in Longley's article cited in the same four-year period no less than 438, 000 premature deaths annually due to either smoking or passive smoking. The report goes on to say that smoking – on average – reduces life expectancy for circa 14 years for adults. According to the latest figures (May 2012) on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, the average U. S. adult life expectancy is 78. 5 years, so a shortening by 14 years would be nearly an 18% reduction! Would you give up almost a fifth of your life for cigarettes?!

Of course, there is another important group who should surely support smoking bans, even though many may not realise it until too late. I am referring to the families of smokers – the loved ones who have to watch a

dear family member suffer an unnecessary and early death. Unfortunately, they too are at risk from passive smoking and may in due course join their departed family member when they themselves contract lung cancer as a result of years of passive smoking in the home. That is sadly not a place subject to smoking bans (yet!).

But what about those whose livelihoods are affected by smoking bans? While smokers are still free to smoke in their own homes and even in a certain percentage of hotel rooms in many countries, income for bar and cafe owners could be reduced because customers can no longer smoke in their establishments, so in many cases might stay away. An article by Grey (January 2012) reports on comments from bar owners in Boise, Idaho, a month or so following the January 2nd 2012 introduction of a smoking ban in locations such as bus stops, bars and the local green belt areas. Many bar owners reported a circa 20% drop in revenues, with even greater reductions at nighttimes. One must have sympathy for such business people whose income has been hit, although they and their staff should now also be less at risk from smoking-related diseases. It should be mentioned that Grey's article also reports that other bars that went non-smoking before the ban came into force reported that the dip in takings was short term. An approach by many bar owners that has been tried successfully to avoid a drop in revenue in warmer climes (e. g. in Spain), is to create or extend outside terraces for customers. This has been very successful, though had a perhaps unexpected adverse consequence. Neighbors complaining about the noise from patrons becoming boisterous late at night! Because they were now outside the bars and in the street, the noise was more evident and intrusive.

So, resolving one problem created another. The same effect was seen in Paris, France when a smoking ban in restaurants was introduced there, according to an article on the Bonjour Paris website by Fawcett (2010). With regard to actual statistical evidence of downturns in bar earnings due to smoking bans, an article by Chris Wetterich (2008) on the Illinois Issues Online website seems to show that recorded sales tax returns refute that view. Wetterich provides the following interesting data for bars/restaurants in six communities that introduced indoor smoking bans:

Community

First Period After Ban

Tax Revenue Change

Following Periods

Springfield

4th quarter 2006

+8. 3%

Following 3 quarters: +7%, +3. 2%, +6. 6%

Bloomington

1st quarter 2007

+8. 4%

Following 2 quarters: +6. 4%, +3. 2%

Normal

1st quarter 2007

+11%

Following 2 quarters: +10. 2%, +15. 8%

Oak Park

3rd quarter 2006

+1. 2%

Following 2 quarters: -2. 1%, +4. 7%

Park Ridge

4th quarter 2006

-0. 5%

Following 3 quarters: -0. 7%, +4. 8%, +3. 7%

Wheaton

1st quarter 2007

-3. 7%

Following 2 quarters: -1. 2%, +2. 5%

Sales Tax Percentage Revenue Changes Following Smoking Ban Introductions

The results show that in the four out of the six communities reviewed, sales tax revenues actually increased after the ban was introduced, and in all but one instance continued that positive trend. In the other two communities, a short-term dip in sales tax revenues was reversed in the following period(s). In all six cases, the only negative changes were in either the first or second periods after the introduction of the bans. The evidence therefore suggests that bar owners' fears are either unfounded or exaggerated. It is after all quite conceivable that members of the public who would previously have avoided (smoky) bars, would be more inclined to drop in for a drink or two, knowing that the atmosphere inside should now be smoke-free, to some

extent at least replacing former (smoking) clients. A friend of mine is asthmatic and finds it almost impossible to breathe if someone “lights up”, even if we are on an outside terrace. So for people like my friend, the interior of a bar is now their preferred spot, simply because they know smoking is banned there.

Another school of thought suggests that smoking bans (and consequent reductions in tobacco sales) cost governments dearly in lost tax revenues. This argument is mostly postulated by pro-smoking organizations, who constantly attempt to undermine the validity of smoking bans, presumably from a self-interest perspective. However, referring back to the Longley article earlier in this essay, I believe that alleged reductions in tax revenues are likely to be more than clawed back through longer term savings in health care costs. I also believe that many people who are compelled (by regulations or on medical advice) to not smoke, turn to substitutes of one sort or another (e. g. chewing gum) to replace the cigarette. Any such products also attract sales tax, going some way to offset the loss of tobacco sales tax.

In conclusion I find that the overwhelming weight of evidence supports the positive benefits of bans on smoking in public places. Not only is it healthier and better for people visiting or patronising establishments like bars and restaurants, in the slightly longer term we should see a decline in the number of deaths from lung cancer and other smoking-related diseases, arising not only from less smoking by the smokers themselves, but also less disease caused to “innocent” people by passive or secondary smoking. Such a reduction in cases of lung and other cancers will also bring significant

savings in distress to families of those contracting smoking-related diseases and savings in health care costs and in reduced amounts of lost productivity in business.

As countries, states, towns, cities and private organizations continue to introduce their own smoking bans, the situation can only improve in the future. Although the picture in the United States is currently piecemeal, i. e. bans are at best state-wide and vary in their extent state-to-state, it is to be hoped and anticipated that a Federal initiative will be taken in the not too distant future, so that the U. S. will support a nationwide ban on smoking in all public places.

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