

Attitudes and beliefs about secondhand smoke and smoke-free policies in four countries: Findings from the International Tobacco Control Four Country Survey

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Abstract

Introduction: This paper describes the varying levels of smoking policies in nationally representative samples of smokers in four countries and examines how these policies are associated with changes in attitudes and beliefs about secondhand smoke over time.

Methods: We report data on 5,788 respondents to Wave 1 of the International Tobacco Control Four Country Survey who were employed at the time of the survey. A cohort of these respondents was followed up with two additional survey waves approximately 12 months apart. Respondents' attitudes and beliefs about secondhand smoke as well as self-reported policies in their workplace and in bars and restaurants in their community were assessed at all waves.

Results: The level of comprehensive smoke-free policies in workplaces, restaurants, and bars increased over the study period for all countries combined and was highest in Canada (30%) and lowest in the United Kingdom (0%) in 2004. In both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, stronger secondhand smoke policies were associated with more favorable attitudes and support for comprehensive regulations. The associations were the strongest for smokers who reported comprehensive policies in restaurants, bars, and their workplace for all three survey waves.

Discussion: Comprehensive smoke-free policies are increasing over time, and stronger policies and the public education opportunities surrounding their passage are associated with more favorable attitudes toward secondhand smoke regulations. The implication for policy makers is that, although the initial debate over smoke-free policies may be tumultuous, once people understand the rationale for implementing smoke-free policies and experience their benefits, public support increases even among smokers, and compliance with smoke-free regulations increases over time.

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