

7.8

Community Interventions: Smoke-free Public Places

There is now incontrovertible evidence that exposure to other people's smoke is dangerous to health.¹³⁷ The health consequences of second-hand smoke have already been discussed in Chapter 4. Exposure to second-hand smoke is an entirely preventable cause of the substantial morbidity and mortality associated with tobacco use.¹³⁸ A growing number of countries and states are now implementing restrictions on smoking in public places. The most obvious benefit of these restrictions is clearly to non-smokers, who are spared exposure to the health risks and nuisance of second-hand smoke. For such restrictions to work, there must be a general level of social support for them, and an awareness of the health consequences of exposure to second-hand smoke.¹³⁹

Smoking bans and restrictions are policies and regulations that ban or limit the consumption of tobacco products in specific places. These include private business and employer policies, organizational regulations, and government laws and ordinances. Laws and ordinances can establish minimum standards to protect workers in private sector workplaces, as well as ban or restrict smoking in public areas and workplaces.¹⁴⁰

Smoke-free workplaces not only protect non-smokers from the dangers of passive smoking but also encourage smokers to quit or reduce consumption. In one study, the combined effect of people stopping smoking and reducing consumption reduced the total cigarette consumption by 29%.¹⁴¹

The WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) has identified the need for

protection from exposure to tobacco smoke. It states that countries should recognize that scientific evidence has unequivocally established that exposure to tobacco smoke causes death, disease and disability (Article 8).¹⁴²

Recently, the Government of India has ordered a ban on smoking in public places. Despite similar bans imposed earlier by several Indian State Governments, smoking is still prevalent in many public places.¹⁴³ Effective policies for smoke-free public places are required to guide implementation at various levels and ensure strict enforcement of the existing laws.¹⁴⁴ The tobacco industry has often challenged the rationale and efficacy of such bans. In this context, it would be useful to review the available evidence.

Global evidence

Several countries have successfully introduced smoke-free public places. Regulations restricting smoking in public places appear to have a considerable impact on teenage smoking behaviour. It affects the teenager's decision to become a smoker rather than on reducing the number of cigarettes smoked.¹⁴¹ Smoking restrictions in the home and bans in public places allow a limited opportunity for smokers to smoke. Properly enforced school bans have been found to be associated with up to 11% reduction in the initiation of smoking.¹⁴⁵ Schools and colleges with no-smoking policies have been shown to have the lowest prevalence of tobacco consumption and their students smoke fewer cigarettes than others.¹⁴⁶⁻¹⁴⁸ Banning smoking in workplaces is a simple and cost-effective way to encourage smokers to quit. Banning smoking in restaurants was found to have either a neutral or beneficial effect on business and may increase patronage by tourists who desire smoke-free restaurants.¹³⁷

Laws for smoke-free places may also be associated with a rapid effect on morbidity resulting from heart disease. A law banning smoking in public- and workplaces in a localized community resulted in a sharp decrease in

hospital admissions for acute myocardial infarction. The significant decrease in admissions was from an average of 40 admissions during the same months in the years before the introduction and after withdrawal of the law, to a total of 24 admissions during the six months when the law was in effect.¹⁴⁹

The US Task Force on Community Preventive Services evaluated the effectiveness of selected interventions. They strongly recommended smoking bans and restrictions on the basis that they reduce exposure to second-hand smoke when applied: (i) in a wide range of workplace settings and adult populations; (ii) at different levels of scale, from individual businesses to entire communities; and (iii) whether used alone or as part of a multicomponent community or workplace intervention.¹³⁹

In addition to the evidence of effectiveness in reducing workplace exposure to second-hand smoke, several studies also observed a significant reduction in the daily consumption of cigarettes by workers who are subjected to a smoking ban or restriction at their workplaces.¹³⁹

Community education provides information to parents, other occupants and visitors to the home that reducing or eliminating second-hand smoke protects non-smoking adults and children. Attempts must be made to motivate household members to modify smoking habits and reduce the exposure of non-smokers to indoor second-hand smoke by establishing home policies, and restricting or banning smoking if they cannot quit entirely.¹³⁹

Enthusiastic endorsement by and active participation of the community are essential for smoking bans to succeed. The 'top-down' regulatory approach must be complemented by a 'bottom-up' community mobilization approach. The government and community must constantly act in concert to enable laws for making public places smoke free to be enacted and successfully implemented (Fig. 7.10).

Indian evidence

There are only a few documented examples in India of success in achieving smoke-free environments. A study among youth (in the age group of 13–15 years), in government and private schools in Uttar Pradesh, reported that many students (60.7%) were in favour of banning smoking in public places.¹⁵⁰ A study from Bihar revealed that in schools that have enforced a no-smoking policy, teachers smoked less compared to schools having no such policy.¹⁵¹

Another example is 'a tobacco-free town' in Kerala. The people from Koolimadu village in Kerala started an anti-smoking movement when a chain smoker, who was a resident of their village, died of cancer. The villagers had a typical example in front of them, so they were convinced about the ill effects of tobacco. Due to the enthusiastic response to the anti-tobacco movement, the district administration imposed a total ban on the use and sale of tobacco products and declared the area a tobacco-free zone. Some of the youth groups have been given the responsibility of monitoring the ban. Due to the success of the movement, the penalty of being excluded from village life for a day has, so far, not had to be imposed.¹⁵²

Before the Government of India banned smoking in public places, a ban on smoking had existed in certain areas. The Indian Airlines was one of the first airlines to ban smoking on domestic flights. The airlines has now extended the ban even on its international flights.¹⁵³ Apart from these, the Indian railways banned smoking in all its service areas.¹⁵⁴ Some institutions such as the Lucknow University banned smoking on the campus.^{149,154} Although several such bans have been introduced in India, there is a lack of data on their effectiveness.

For enforcement of the newly enacted legislation for tobacco control, there is a need to gather such evidence of the impact on both active and passive exposure to tobacco smoke. However, studies from other countries are sufficient to

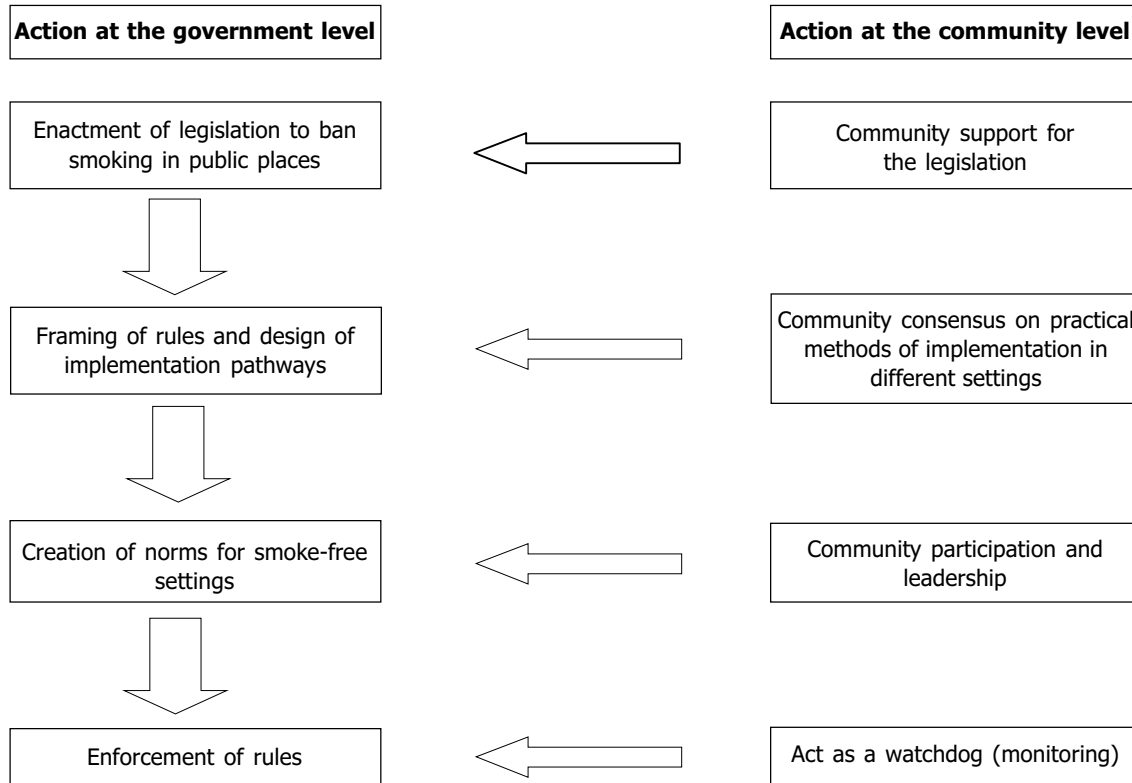


Fig. 7.10 Complementary roles of the government and community in making public places smoke free

show the effectiveness of such bans as a mechanism for tobacco control. In selecting and implementing interventions, there is a need to develop a comprehensive strategy to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke, reduce

initiation and increase cessation. Improvements in each category will contribute to reductions in tobacco-related morbidity and death, and success in one area might contribute to improvements in other areas as well.¹⁵⁵

7.8 COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS: SMOKE-FREE PUBLIC PLACES

KEY MESSAGES

- Exposure to second-hand smoke is an entirely preventable cause of significant morbidity and mortality associated with tobacco use.
- Smoke-free workplaces not only protect non-smokers from the dangers of passive smoking, they also encourage smokers to quit or reduce consumption.
- For smoking bans to succeed, enthusiastic endorsement by and active participation of the community and an awareness of the health consequences of exposure to second-hand smoke are needed.
- The combined effect of people stopping smoking and reducing consumption reduces the total cigarette consumption by 29%.
- Regulations restricting smoking in public places have a considerable impact on teenage smoking behaviour. It affects the teenager's decision to become a smoker rather than the number of cigarettes smoked.