

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT OF SMOKE-FREE LAWS AND POLICIES IN MALAYSIA AMONG MALAYSIAN SMOKERS

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Smoking has remained prevalent for decades in Malaysia. Smoke-free laws (SFL) and policies could deter smoking by strengthening anti-smoking norms. Both international and local studies revealed inadequate SFL implementation and enforcement, leading to high secondhand smoke (SHS) exposure in Malaysia. Understanding these challenges and opportunities is crucial for improving policy and enhancing public health outcomes. **OBJECTIVES:** We examined how SFL impacts quit intention among Malaysian smokers through smoking social norms and SFL support (mediators) while considering socioeconomic status (SES) as a moderator. Challenges and opportunities in implementing and enforcement of SFL and policies were also explored. **METHODOLOGY:** A convergent parallel mixed-methods approach was used, incorporating secondary data from the International Tobacco Control Malaysia Survey 2020 and semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) with local tobacco control experts (purposive sampling, May–December 2022). Descriptive analysis and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling using Stata 17.0 and Smart-PLS 4.0.9.2, while qualitative data were analysed using the Framework method and NVivo 1.6.1 software. Triangulation of findings provided a comprehensive evaluation of SFL through SWOT analysis. **RESULTS:** Support for comprehensive SFL in public venues was substantial among smokers, particularly in non-air-conditioned eateries (66.7%), workplaces (65.5%), and night-time entertainment venues (49.9%). Although SFL has minimal direct impact on quit intentions, lower SES smokers may be more responsive to societal attitudes against smoking concerning quitting intentions. Challenges to effective implementation and enforcement of SFL include tobacco industry interference, stakeholder attitudes, social norms, resource scarcity, and political and organizational barriers. However, community-led initiatives, multi-faceted advocacy, synergistic collaborative efforts, and proactive enforcement offer improvement opportunities, requiring commitment and leadership from local champions and authorities. **CONCLUSION:** SFL can protect non-smokers from SHS, promote anti-smoking norms, and support cessation, especially for lower SES smokers. Expert insights on implementation challenges and opportunities reinforce the need for smoke-free environments and are crucial in refining strategies and fostering local initiatives.

Keywords: Tobacco control policy, Smoke-free, Smoking social norms, Socioeconomic inequalities, Malaysia
