Observing smoking in outdoor public spaces

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Outline

- Background: Smokefree outdoor public places
- Methods: How and where we conducted observations
- Preliminary findings
- Where to next?
Smokefree outdoor public places

- International growth of smokefree parks, playgrounds, café patios, etc. since 2000
- About 40% of NZ local councils have ‘educational’ smokefree playground policies
- Little evaluation of outdoor policies internationally
- Little work on methods for outdoor smoking prevalence

Previous HePPRU observation projects
(excluding TV, internet & video observations and mechanical recordings – eg, PM$_{2.5}$)

1. Food ads and availability near secondary schools (summer student 2004)
2. Bus/train passengers (with summer student 2008-9)
3. Food availability & marketing at sports grounds (ongoing)
4. Smoking in cars (5th year 2005; 2011 smoking on streets)
5. Butts on streets (5th year 2006)
6. Tobacco displays in shops (5th year 2007)
7. Smoking in pubs, restaurants, bars, transportation settings, outdoor areas of bars/restaurants (2006)
8. Cigarette packs on streets (competition 2009)
9. Smoking on streets (4th yr 2010; 2011)
Aims

- To develop methods for assessing outdoor smoking prevalence
- To trial the methods in a range of sites and cities in two countries

Methods: Where we observed

- In two countries: United Kingdom and New Zealand
- In eight cities:
  - Bristol, Bath, London, Edinburgh
  - Wellington, Palmerston North, Auckland, Dunedin
- In three types of places: (dimensions varied)
  - Children’s play areas
  - Shopping malls, streets, similar busy public spaces
  - Transport waiting places (train stations, bus stops and airports)
Sites and types of observation areas  
(Total time of 19 hrs 20 minutes at 58 sites)

Play areas | Street, malls | Transport waiting areas
---|---|---
8 | 10 | 12
6 | 10 | 12

Methods: How we observed

- Iterative development of observation schedule
- Final schedule:
  - 30-second scan of the selected area every 5 minutes for 20 minutes (five scans)
  - Counted:
    - people present
    - people smoking
    - children who looked to be under 12 years of age
  - Also counted, measured, photographed: ‘No smoking’ signage, butt litter, ashtrays etc.
Overall results

- **Methods:**
  - Observation schedule was effective over varying sites, cities and countries

- **Findings from the data:**
  - Less smoking in playgrounds compared to other sites
  - More smoking seen in NZ than in UK, in street and transport waiting areas

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**Smokers outside the John Snow pub Soho, London**
Numbers of people recorded
(3191 including 475 children and 181 smokers)

Range of people at sites: 7 (PN airport) to 127 (Oxford Street, London)
Proportions of people smoking in outdoor public places

Play areas smokers: 1.6
Streets smokers: 5.1
Transport areas smokers: 7.1

Playground signs: UK
Signs NZ

- ferry/mall
- sport/railway
- playgrounds

Auckland airport

- Domestic
- International
Auckland airport

Designated smoking area  Non-smoking area

Wellington & Dunedin airports

Designated & non smoking next to each other
Discussion

- Considerable work to be done on methods
  - More sites over longer periods to enable stronger results
  - Extend diversity of sites – e.g. Outdoor bars/cafés

- Smoking continues to be seen as a normal and acceptable behaviour in streets and transport waiting places, but perhaps not in playgrounds

NZ policy implications

- Local or national smokefree doorways policy?
  - 82% agree: “Smoking should not be allowed within five metres of the entrance of all buildings used by the public, like shops, offices …”

- Café and bar outdoor areas
  - 62% agree: “Smoking should not be allowed outside bars and restaurants, in areas that can be seen by children and young people”

- Transport waiting areas and queues

- NZ national smokefree playground policy possible?:
  - Over 80% NZ public support
Limitations

- Our study:
  - Exploratory study: Insufficient data for statistically significant results
  - Solo observers: No reliability check

- Observation in general
  - No control over natural settings
  - Areas cannot be comparable across different cities, different types of site, seasons, weather, times of day

Strengths

- Method requires minimal training and equipment; can be economical
- Method applicable to most public outdoor places
- Smoking observations can be complemented by butt and pack counts
- Relatively unobtrusive
- Few ethical issues
So what, and where next?

- Good potential for methods that complement existing self-report studies
- Further regional and national projects planned using observation
- International comparisons
  - Beaches
  - Outdoor cafés

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