

Serving Smoke-free Air

How close are we from banning smoking in public places in Lebanon



Don't you wish to come back from Gemayzeh not smelling like an ashtray!? Or is it one of your dreams that will never come true.

Although Lebanon signed the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in December 2005 in which it agreed to implement smoke-free policies within 5 years, nothing has been done yet on the national level and smoke-free policies in Lebanon are still one of the weakest in the Middle East region.

What are some of the arguments for smokers?

Many smokers actually support smoke-free places. However, some do not. The below are the most frequently heard arguments.

*"I like smoking, it is cool...
I feel good when I smoke,
I feel free"*

Does it look good to have damaged teeth, wrinkled skin, yellowish nails? What about having a horrible breath!? Smok-

"You want to breathe clean air, let us have a smoking area for me and a non-smoking area for you"

Having smoking and non-smoking areas in one restaurant are not effective because polluted air cannot be confined in one space. In a demonstration, it was shown that, with only 8 cigarettes lit, the level of pollutants in a non-smoking area of an amphitheatre was the same as that in the smoking area after only 6 minutes of smoking.

"Our economy is mainly relying on tourism; banning smoking will harm the economy and affect tourism"

Countries with a considerable tourism industry like UK, India, Italy, Egypt, United Arab Emirates have introduced strong tobacco control policies and

However, some private institutions, including restaurants, cafés and pubs, have taken a personal initiative and adopted measures of smoking bans... and their experience has been successful!

Managers of hospitality venues affirmed that having non-smoking areas or smoke-free days did not affect their sales. On the contrary, this has attracted new clientele, such as pregnant women, moms with their children and asthmatics. Also, the staff and waiters acknowledged that smoke-free policies protect them from the health hazards of second-hand smoke and other irritating side-effects, such as eye irritation and the smell of tobacco.

The main perceived barrier to the wider implementation of smoke-free places is the absence of a comprehensive national law that applies to all restaurants and cafés. When some places are smoke-free and others are not, smoking customers can choose to go to smoke-permitting establishments which may result in financial loss for non-smoking establishments.

ing is not cool; it is the number one killer in the world. The tobacco industry is working hard to get more and more people addicted to cigarettes to increase their sales and replace smokers who die by young people getting hooked to nicotine.

"Banning smoking will not work... it is impossible in Lebanon"

Well if others did it, why can't we do it? Smoke-free policies are already implemented in many countries of our region including Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Amman, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and Dubai.

"You can't oblige me not to smoke: this is my right. Plus, smokers are the majority here"

Sorry to tell you that in Lebanon non-smokers are the majority, 54% of men and 65% of women do not smoke, and they should be the ones protesting and asking for their right to breathe clean air.

"Before banning smoking, you have to worry about pollution from cars and industrial chimneys"

Well, sitting in a restaurant where people are smoking is like sitting in the Salim Salam tunnel. Tobacco smoke contributes little to overall pollution levels in the city, but it accounts for 70% of an individual's exposure to cancer causing toxins in air due to our close proximity to the tobacco smoke.

"You can move from smoke-permissive to totally smoke-free, this should be done step by step"

For every 8 smokers that die from smoking, one non-smoker dies from tobacco smoke exposure. Every month of delay will result in the deaths of hundreds of people. Delaying the implementation of smoke-free policies is one of the strategies of the tobacco industry. The tobacco industry would like to continue to have open access to Lebanon's hearts and lungs, and will do everything it its power to delay or block tobacco control legislation.

tobacco policies, and either had neutral or positive effect on promoting business. As for the economy, in fact, the cost of health care and cancer treatment related to tobacco use and exposure to second-hand smoke as well as lost days of work due to illness and morbidity pose a sizeable burden on the Lebanese economy. In all experiences worldwide, tobacco control not only saved lives but also saved money.

"You are fighting smoking and the Lebanese are concerned about survival. Forget about it, there are other priorities to worry about"

Sure there are many priorities in Lebanon and tobacco control is not in contradiction with other issues that also need attention. Adopting and implementing a tobacco control policy that protects Lebanese citizens is a step in the right direction. Moreover, there is no added cost to be shouldered by government.

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