

Research, Advocacy & Public Policy-Making

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Policy Series: Tobacco Control Research #2

AUB Tobacco Control Research Group (AUB-TCRG)

The Mission of AUB-TCRG is to promote public health by producing and disseminating evidence-based tobacco control research.

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) was inaugurated in 2006 to harness the policy-related research of AUB's internationally respected faculty and other scholars, in order to contribute positively to Arab policy-making and international relations. IFI is a neutral, dynamic, civil, and open space that brings together people representing all viewpoints in society. It aims to: raise the quality of public policy-related debate and decision-making in the Arab World and abroad; enhance the Arab World's input into international affairs; and, enrich the quality of interaction among scholars, officials and civil society actors in the Middle East and abroad.

A Smoke Free Campus: Lessons Learned from AUB

Summary

Following the adoption of a No Smoking Policy (NSP) by the American University of Beirut (AUB), the vast majority (90%) of undergraduate and graduate students surveyed, and over a third (36%) of them who smoked were satisfied with the new policy; with a full compliance (respecting the designated smoking areas) rate of 73% among the smokers surveyed. In addition, 1 in 6 smokers reported receiving a warning ticket when smoking in non-designated areas. And, 20% of regular smokers reported a reduction in their smoking as a result of the ban. These results show that a NSP on university campuses should be endorsed.

Background

Although a no smoking policy, which banned smoking from all university buildings (except for private residences), had been in place at AUB since the year 2000, it wasn't until June of 2008 that AUB President Waterbury put into effect a full campus-wide ban. The President endorsed the comprehensive plan put forward by the Tobacco Free Campus Initiative, established in 2007 by the AUB Wellness Committee.

AUB's 2008 No Smoking Policy (NSP)

1. AUB prohibits smoking "anywhere" on the university campus, except for private faculty residences and designated smoking areas. Moreover, smoking is not permitted in university vehicles. AUB and AUBMC faculty, staff, students, patients and visitors are required to abide by the policy. The designated smoking areas extend over a radius of 5 meters from the "Smoking Area" signs.
2. Tobacco promotion, sales, distribution and advertisements of tobacco products are strictly forbidden on campus; including a ban on any financial contribution from tobacco companies

Policy Recommendations

For a university campus-wide No Smoking Policy (NSP) to succeed:

1. Top-level re-enforcement and support from University Faculty and Administration is critical to facilitating proper implementation and compliance.
2. Violators from the enforcing body are also subject to disciplinary action to give credibility to the NSP.
3. Designated smoking areas should have well-defined boundaries to ensure compliance.
4. Smoking cessation should be offered through its university health care delivery services and widely advertised.

“ Students and faculty would complain: Why every morning do I have to go through a cloud of smoke to get into my classroom. What about my rights? ”
(top management – non-smoker)

Research, Advocacy and Public Policy-making in the Arab World (RAPP)

The goal of the RAPP program is to forge an Arab contribution to global knowledge in the practice of policy-making. It aims to bridge existing policy-making knowledge gaps by documenting experiences, replicating successful ones, and assessing and improving weak ones. Its uniqueness lies in being an indigenous effort by a policy research institute based in the Arab world, collectively with other regional institutes, to assess and improve how research is influencing policy making.

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to sports and cultural events. In addition, tobacco companies are not allowed to participate in the annual job fair event on campus.

3. A smoking cessation program at AUBMC is available free of charge to all faculty, staff and students.
4. AUB's Protection Office is authorized to enforce the policy. The officers are authorized to monitor compliance among faculty, staff, students and visitors. Violators are asked to discard the cigarette immediately. On the second violation or if they refuse to comply, the violators are asked to supply their AUB credentials; The Provost, the Dean of Student Affairs, the immediate supervisor or dean are then notified for disciplinary action to be taken.

“ Here [in Lebanon], people don't even think about this issue. For example banning smoking in public places, is not existent. You would see people smoking in the corridors of hospitals. Or you would take a cab and the person next to you would light a cigarette. This is not acceptable. So, on the national level, laws are not enforced ”
(top management – smoker)

Obstacles faced in implementation of the NSP

1. Designating Smoking Areas:
 - a. Smokers complained about being forced to smoke outdoors in winter under the rain and under the summer heat.
 - b. Smokers did not know how far away from the smoking benches they could stand and smoke; so they kept on expanding the boundaries.
 - c. Some smoking areas were in close proximity to populated buildings causing concentrated smoke to travel through windows, reaching offices and classrooms.
2. Lack of comprehensive non smoking policy in Lebanon: Among the main barriers to implementation was the lack of a comprehensive Lebanese policy banning smoking in public places and poor policy enforcement. This attitude created a challenging environment for a NSP to be adopted at AUB.
3. Enforcement: The enforcing body, AUB's Protection Office, had two main obstacles:
 - a. Approaching staff and faculty to extinguish their cigarettes was problematic, and socially awkward.
 - b. Reporting smoking offenses was perceived to be more difficult by protection officers who were smokers themselves. So non-smokers in the Protection Office were assigned to enforce the NSP, which gave the policy more credibility, and since violators from the Protection Office were also subject to disciplinary action, it thus increased trust in the Protection Office as a responsible authority to enforce the NSP.
4. Awareness of cessations services: Although cessation services were offered free of charge, students, faculty and staff were not aware of them and so did not make use of those services. This was seen as an obstacle to NSP compliance.

As a case-study, AUB's NSP has shown that it is feasible. Promoting AUB's successful NSP will lead to other universities achieving successful NSP at the local and regional level. ■



AUB Tobacco Control Research Group www.aub.edu.lb/units/tcrg/

Data sources:

This policy brief is a result of a research study consisting of a quantitative survey with students, qualitative focus groups with students and in-depth interviews with top management involved in the implementation and enforcement of the non-smoking policy at AUB. The presented data is a triangulation of methods and sources. The research was granted ethical approval by the IRB at AUB.

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Research team:

Rima Afifi, Monique Chaaya, Rima Nakkash, and Joanna Khalil at the Faculty of Health Sciences were the main investigators on this research project. Joanna Khalil drafted the policy brief.