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Smoking on the Margins? Assessing the Effects of a Smoke-free Law in Parks and on Beaches

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Pederson, Ann; Okoli, Chizimuzo T.C.; Rice, Wendy; Chasey, Steve; Moshrefzadeh, Arezu; Bottorff, Joan L.; Hemsing, Natalie; Greaves, Lorraine; and Poole, Nancy, "Smoking on the Margins? Assessing the Effects of a Smoke-free Law in Parks and on Beaches" (2012). *Nursing Presentations*. 27.

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Smoking on the Margins? Assessing the Effects of a Smoke-free Law in Parks and on Beaches

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OBJECTIVES

This study uses a health equity lens to examine the development, adoption and implementation of an outdoor smoke-free bylaw in Vancouver, BC, Canada. The study aims to:

- Understand the health and health equity effects of a new outdoor smoke-free policy in parks and on beaches;
- Assess the differential impacts of the policy for diverse groups of women and men, in particular those with a high prevalence and susceptibility to smoking and those who are exposed to secondhand smoke (SHS);
- Develop recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of future smoke-free policies to reduce any unintended contributions to health inequities arising from their implementation.



ENFORCEMENT

Vancouver outdoor smoke-free bylaw enforcement statistics

	2010	2011	2012
Voluntary compliance	723	6274	23
Formal verbal warning		20	
Written warning		61	
MTI	1	42	

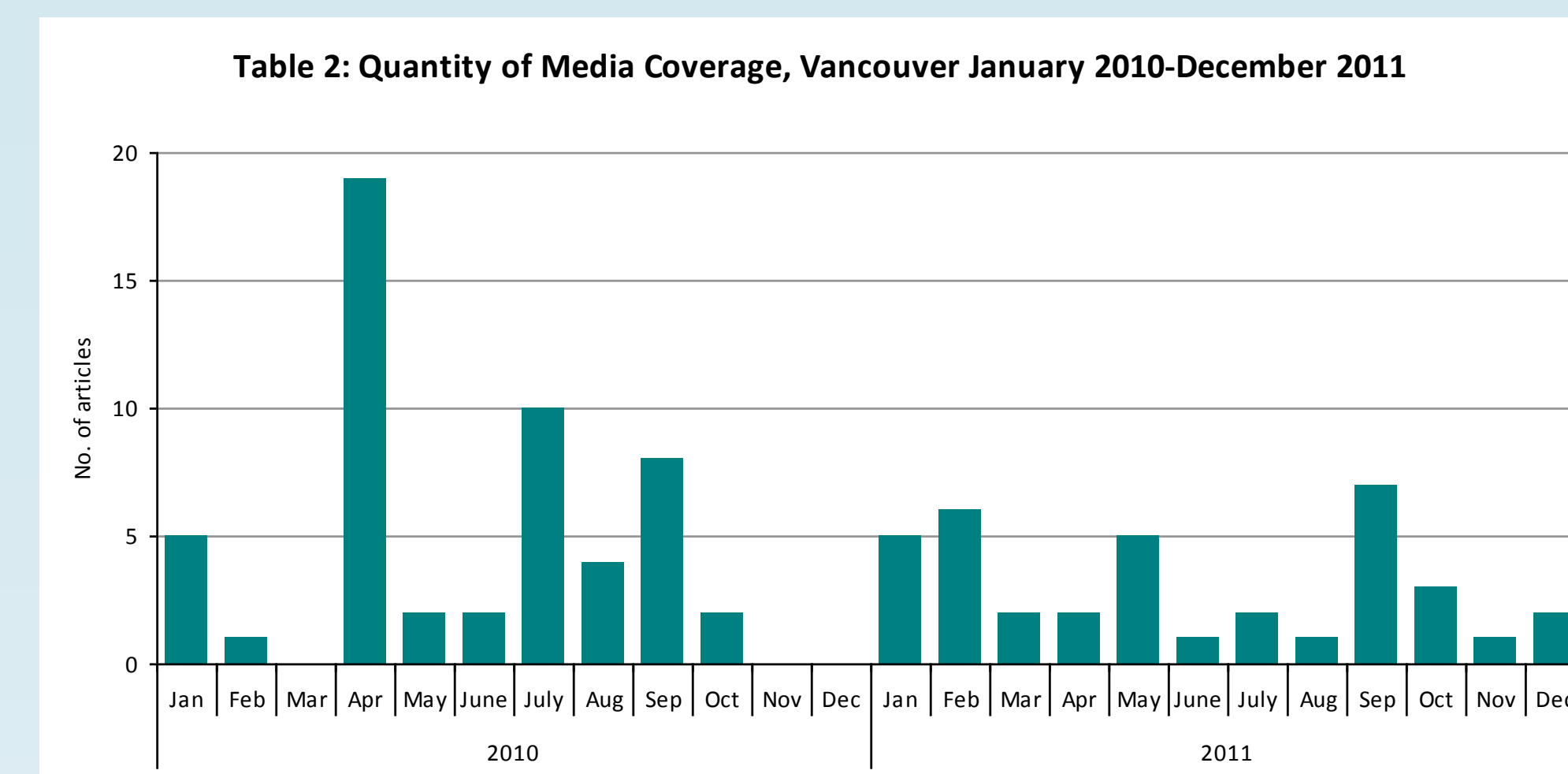
Source – Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation

SMOKING PREVALENCE

- Observational data collection was carried out pre- and post-law implementation at selected parks and beaches.
- Findings suggest that although there were no changes in absolute rates of observed smoking behaviour, overall frequency of smoking in selected parks and beaches declined in the year after the smoke-free law was introduced.

MEDIA ANALYSIS

- Using Agenda Setting theory, we identified articles that mentioned outdoor smoke-free policy in four Vancouver newspapers.
- There were 90 relevant articles in the study period.
- Findings suggest that the greatest increase in the agenda setting potential of news coverage regarding the smoke-free bylaw was in April 2010 when the bylaw was announced.



DISCUSSION

- Document analysis indicates strong political support for the bylaw, with advocates of the bylaw playing a key role in the development process.
- Non-smokers were significantly more likely to believe that the bylaw would improve health, protect the health of non-smokers and children in parks, encourage smoking cessation, discourage youth initiation and protect from SHS exposure.
- Further interviews and analysis are necessary to determine awareness and concern about potential effects of such bylaws on vulnerable populations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the rest of the team members, collaborators and partners involved in this project: Jack Boomer, Ellen Hahn, Tom Heah, Natasha Jategaonkar, Andrew Johnson, Milan Khara, Phoebe Long, Deborah McLellan, Chris Richardson, Thomas Soulliere, and Christina Tonella.

This study is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

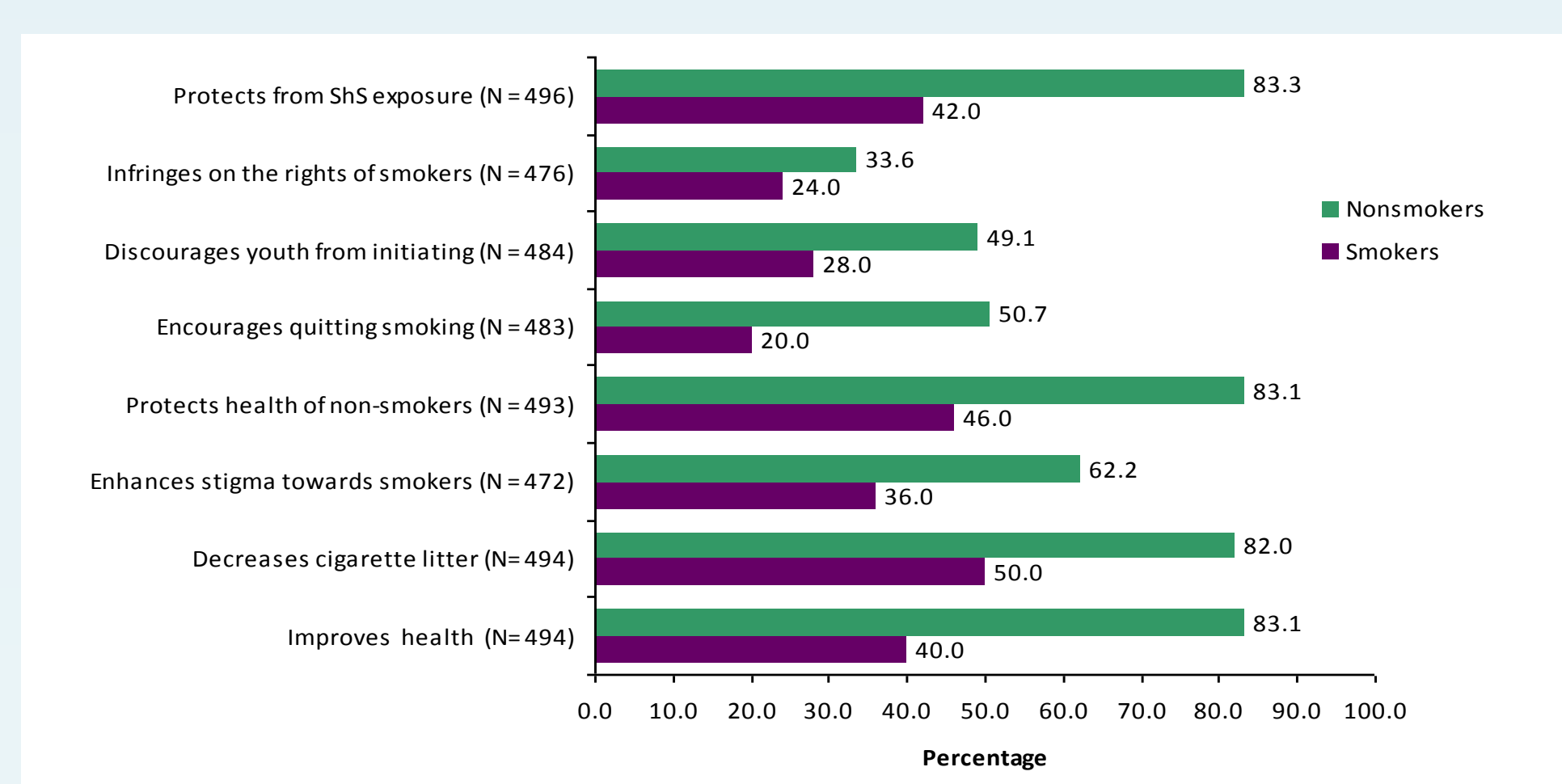
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

- In the spring of 2010, the Vancouver Park Board and City Council both unanimously passed motions to implement a smoke-free bylaw in parks and on beaches, effective September 1, 2010.
- Authority for regulating the ban was given to the Park Board, with Park Rangers and police to act as enforcement officials. Enforcement was limited from September 2010-May 2011; officials used this period to further raise awareness and introduce signage to parks and beaches.
- Prior to the ban, a campaign was launched to educate park and beach users about the upcoming bylaw using signage, media coverage and on-site awareness materials.
- A fine for violating the bylaw was set at \$250 CDN; the Municipal Ticketing Information (MTI) is used to manage the ticketing process.
- Subsequent enforcement seeks to achieve compliance through an escalated enforcement schedule consisting of voluntary compliance, formal verbal warning, written warning and then a fine.
- Health advocates were key to the development of support for the bylaw. They are less involved in the implementation phase of the bylaw.

PUBLIC OPINION

- A telephone survey indicates that support for the bylaw was significantly associated with being female, believing that the bylaw protects the health of non-smokers and children and discourages youth initiation, and believing that the law will protect people from SHS exposure.
- Believing that the bylaw would infringe on smoker's rights was significantly associated with not supporting the bylaw.

Table 1: Support for Vancouver's outdoor smoke-free bylaw



METHODS

This study employs a mixed-method approach informed by Equity-focused Health Impact Assessment. The study aims to generate a comprehensive understanding of a policy in context. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, the study is:

- Examining the development and implementation of the smoke-free bylaw;
- Assessing public and key informant opinions regarding the introduction and implementation of the smoke-free bylaw;
- Documenting the rates of compliance among park and beach users;
- Describing the experiences of enforcing the bylaw;
- Investigating the impact of the bylaw on diverse populations.