

FOR OR AGAINST THE SMOKING BAN IN RESTAURANTS IN GREECE?

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A considerable number of countries have applied laws for the ban of smoking in public places. Furthermore, the separate area for smokers and non-smokers customers in private places such as restaurants and bars, is a significant change that has caused positive or negative attitudes. The different views of customers and restaurant owners have created a legal and social debate. The findings suggest that on the one hand, the majority of the restaurant owners impose the law, but not actively. On the other hand, the non-smokers are in favour of the smoking ban and they have not reduced their visits in restaurants, whereas the smokers have reduced their visits and consumption to those restaurants that impose the law.

Introduction

Since the financial crisis in Greece in 2009, the restaurant industry faced many challenges and problems. Although, from 2005 to 2008 there was an annual increase of 16% of the revenues, in 2009 the industry faced a decrease in revenues that reached the 13%. The restaurant industry in Greece for many decades was contributing to the Greek economy, however, the last two years there has been a decrease of the revenues in the industry that costs the shut down in many businesses (Marinakou, 2011). One of the main factors that have contributed to this situation is the smoking ban that has been recently implemented in Greece. On the one hand the customers who do not smoke see this ban favourably, on the other hand the smokers have lessen their visits to restaurants and bars. The restaurant owners are in the middle as they are forced by the government to implement the law, but they see their revenues reducing. This paper aims at presenting the views that both customers and restaurant owners have for the smoking ban in Greece.

1. An overview of the smoking ban

A considerable number of countries have applied laws for the ban of smoking in public places. This change has led to positive and negative customers' and owners' attitudes as they face many challenges with the implementation of the smoking ban. Many have studied the impacts of the ban and whether it has benefited or damaged the restaurant industry in financial terms. The ban is imposed in order to reduce risks to public health and welfare and to protect the rights of the non-smokers, employees and other customers in the regulated establishments. Nevertheless, the smoking ban is a controversial subject, as those who smoke are against the ban and support that it is their personal right to be able to smoke in public, whereas those who do not smoke or have never smoked, see the smoking ban favourably. The different views have created a legal and social debate (www.ezinearticles.com, 2011).

Interestingly, 40% of men and the 9% of women are smoking in Greece. Additionally, Greece is the country that consumes the largest amount of tobacco products in Europe (<http://www.apn.gr>, 2010). In fact, Tamvakas and Amos (2010:955) suggest that "Greece is at an earlier stage of the smoking epidemic than countries such as the UK and the US where smoking in adults and young people has been declining since the 1970s". However, since the 1st of September, 2010 smoking is not permitted in public spaces; and every kind of advertising of tobacco is forbidden in Greece. Moreover, it is not allowed to sell tobacco products to children under the age of 18, or through the internet. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Tourism and the Health and Social Solidarity Ministry decided to have some exceptions for the areas that have a great number of tourists in the tourism season (www.nonsmokersclub.com, 2010). However, smoking is not allowed in working places and fines have been and will be given to the smokers that do not comply with the law. In fact, the fines to the people who continue smoking range from 500 to 10.000 euros (Tamvakas and Amos, 2010:956). At the same time, the owners that will be penalised more than 4 times are facing severe penalties such as confiscation or the closure of their business for even 10 days.

All the businesses, especially those that are more than 300 m² were given a seven-month period to rearrange the areas and separate their establishments into smoking and non-smoking areas. For controlling purposes the prefecture and the municipal policy were given the authority to assess for any violations and give the fines (Health and Social Solidarity Ministry, 2010).

Interestingly, since the 1st September of 2010, 114,367 calls have been made for complaints about smokers and business owners that do not obey

to the law. Evidently, a lot of people, mostly non-smokers, were waiting for the implementation of the law and their disagreement with smoking is obvious. (<http://www.apn.gr>, 2010).

2. The smoking ban and the consumption in restaurants

In their study Aung et al (2001) propose that the changes due to the smoking ban in restaurants caused a lot of concern to the owners, who believed that their customers would reduce their visitation. However, they claim that finally all the customers in their study did not change their behaviour as the law applied in all the restaurants and they did not have any other choice, thus they got used to the new situation. Furthermore, Craven and Marlow (2008) suggest that there is no evidence in their study that all businesses either have profits or losses from the ban of smoking. It is quite logical for any owner to be concerned for what customers prefer and if smoking will affect their businesses. There are still some concerns about separating the areas in any restaurant for smokers and non-smokers especially if the number of them on premises is equal. However, they found that there are some problems depending on the number of people that visit the restaurant.

Moreover, Marlow (2008) offers some further evidence. Firstly, he states that the restaurants that have few smokers customers in the study are using air filtration system and have designed the area along with the non-smoker customers' needs. Additionally, the owners that have a great number of smoker customers are more concerned for losses in their restaurants than those who have not. Moreover he states that after the ban of smoking in private areas, restaurant managers are trying to adjust prices, wages and even hours of operation in order to achieve the best. With all those changes not only customers are affected but employees too, as the customers are offered better prices, and the employees work in more flexible work shifts.

In another study, Glantz and Smith (1999) found that the smoking ban has not only negatively influenced the profits in the restaurant industry, but on the contrary they have risen. Similarly, Kunzill et al (2003) suggest that there was an increase of 10% in the sales in the non-smoking café that they studied. They also suggest that the tips for the waiters were more in the area where smoking was not allowed. The participants in this study suggest that the smoking ban should be mandatory in the whole bar and the owner is responsible for implementing the law. Similarly, in another study, Marlow and Dunham (2004) agree and propose that smoke free

restaurants benefit both employees and customers. In addition, they claim that smokers cannot ignore the fact that non-smokers are harmed from the secondhand smoke. Moreover, Alamar and Glantz (2004) have found that the smoke free restaurants have an increase of 16% in their profits, contrary to the restaurants that have not imposed the law. Similarly, Marlow and Dunham (2000) suggest that it costs less to large firms to separate smokers from non smokers, but a lot to smaller businesses. Still, in their study, 51% of the restaurant owners predict no decrease on the revenues compared to the 39% of the restaurant owners that believe in economic impacts of the law.

Concerning the rearrangement in the restaurants the studies propose that it is a difficult and expensive decision for the owners. Cuthbert and Nickson (1999) propose that all restaurants should impose the law without any other propositions, such as the redesign and rearrangement to accommodate the customers in different separated areas. Even though the air space is commonly viewed as a public resource each owner is forced to separate this public area equally so that both smokers and non-smokers will be satisfied (Costa and Mossialos, 2006).

On the one hand, the customers that smoke however, believe that if they do not smoke at the end of their meal, the experience is unfinished (Aung et al, 2001). The same study proposes that the customers are not willing to go out and smoke and they prefer to dine at home. Biener and Siegel (1997) suggest that smokers are against the smoking ban in restaurants. On the other hand, the non-smokers suggest that they are not willing to go to restaurants that have no separated areas or smoking is allowed (Aung et al, 2001). They want a smoke free experience (Biener and Siegel, 1997). Interestingly, Tamvakas and Amos (2010) state that the participants in the study believe that the Greeks will not finally impose the law, although they all believe that it is the owners' responsibility to impose the law.

3. Methodological Approach

The data were collected for this paper through self-administrated questionnaires distributed to 200 customers of restaurants in Athens, and 100 were collected back, providing a 50 percent of response rate. The respondents were chosen among the visitors of the restaurants in the study. Half are smokers and the other half are non-smokers as both views are valued for this study. The questionnaire was designed having done a thorough literature review on the smoking ban and its effect in other countries with a focus on the restaurant sector.

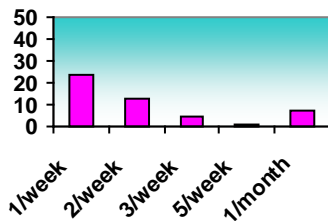
In addition, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the restaurant owners in order to identify their views on how the smoking ban has influenced their businesses.

4. Results

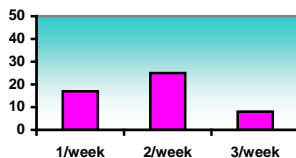
4.1 Survey

The participants in the study were 100 in total. 50 are smokers and 50 are non smokers, among those 49 are women and 51 men. The ages vary as 45% are between 18-24 years old, 28% are between 25 and 34 and 21% are between the ages of 35-44. Finally, only the 6 % are between the ages of 45-54. It has to be underlined that 15 out of 50 smokers consider themselves as heavy smokers.

Graph 1: Smokers frequency



Graph 2: Non smokers frequency



Graph 1 and graph 2 show the frequency of visits in restaurants that smokers and non smokers respectively have on a weekly basis. It is

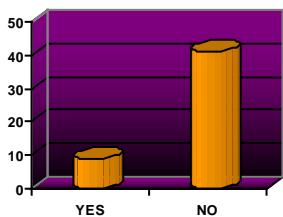
evident that, 25 out of 50 non smokers customers visit a restaurant twice a week whereas in the group of smokers, only 13 out of 50 have the same frequency. Furthermore, 14% of smokers visit a restaurant once a month, when non smokers will visit at least once a week a restaurant in order to have dinner.

To continue with, there is a balance between the days of the week that smokers mostly visit restaurants. 50% prefer the weekend and the other 50% wish to dine all the days of the week. On the other hand, 42 out of 50 non smokers prefer to dine both in the weekend and between Mondays to Fridays and only 8 out of 50 prefer specifically the weekend. Furthermore, the majority of the participants (54%) stay in a restaurant from 1 to 2 hours. Less than 20, stay more than 2 hours and there is a 22% of customers that dine in less than an hour.

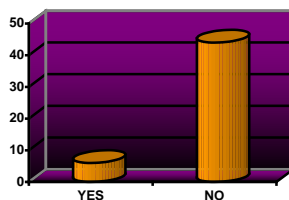
Concerning smokers' attitudes towards the law about smoking, 50% of them obey to the rules and do not smoke in restaurants and the other half have continued smoking even after the implementation of the law. The main reason as they claimed is that the restaurant owners allow them to do so. They also mentioned that restaurant owners have not imposed the smoking law actively and the situation is the same as it was before the implementation of the law.

Another significant point is that none of the non smoker customers had limited the consumption of food or drinks after the implementation of the smoking law. However, 14% of the smoker customers suggest that they have limited the consumption of food and drinks after the implementation. Finally 1 out of 50 smokers suggested that he or she limited the consumption of drinks.

Graph 3: smoker's attitudes for the authorities



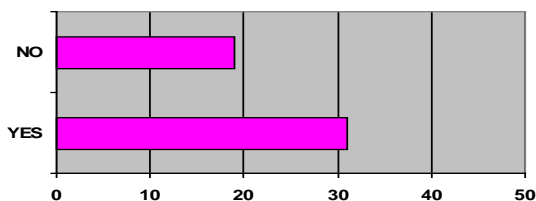
Graph 4: non smoker's attitudes for the authorities



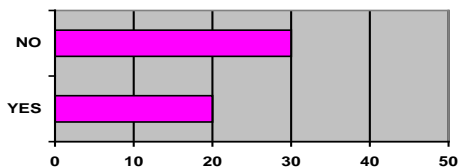
Evidently more than 80 customers both smokers and non smokers have never seen antismoking authorities in a restaurant after the implementation of the law. It has to be mentioned that the research was conducted three months after the smoking ban in Greece.

The participants' opinion on the smoking law in general was part of the research as it is shown in graph 5 and graph 6.

Graph 5: non smoker's opinions for the future imposition



Graph 6: smoker's opinions for the future imposition



40% of the non smoker customers evaluated the smoking law with the highest degree, when 8 of them evaluated it in the middle as they find the law as very strict for the smokers. Furthermore they agreed that there should be an extension period in order for smokers to adapt and get used to the new situation. Contrary to the above is the opinion that smokers have for the smoking law, where 42% evaluated it with the worst degree. There was a 36% of the group that evaluated the law in the middle having agreed with the non smokers. Additionally, smokers believe that the two groups should have equal rights.

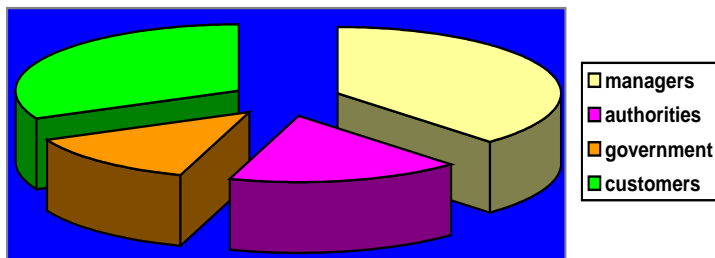
The above show that the two groups of customers have different views on the implementation of the smoking law actively. Interestingly, both smokers and non smokers agree in the justification of their negative answer. They consider that Greeks cannot obey to the rules and that there is flexibility on behalf of the law and how it is implemented by the restaurant owners. These results confirm the research by Tamvakas and

Amos (2010) conducted in Greece a few months before the implementation of the smoking law and showed the same results. The participants in their study drew their attention to what happened previously, to the rebellious Greek character, and their cynicism about the government in concluding that the legislation would be ineffective.

Furthermore, 94% of non smoker's customers said that they will not reduce their visits to restaurants if the restaurant owners impose the law actively. Opposing this view, the 70% of the smokers will limit their visits contrary to 20% that will remain in the same position and 10% that have not decided yet. In another study, Alamar and Glantz (2004) provided similar results, more specifically they suggest that non smokers are willing to increase their frequency dining out more contrary to smokers that would limit their visits.

Interestingly 66% of the participants in the study were not aware of the law and more specifically did not know that the first time the law was implemented in Greece was in 2002. At that time there were some exceptions from the rule, and those refer to night clubs and casinos, as they could allow smoking on their premises. 71% of the participants find this exception unfair.

Graph 7: Customers perception



The majority of the customers believe that managers are responsible for the current situation and they should impose the law. On the other hand, 32% of the customers believe that they themselves are responsible for the imposition of the smoking law.

4.1 Interviews

The restaurant owners have a different point of view from the customers, as the majority of them gave a positive answer and they believe that they should all apply the law since the 1st of September 2010. Nevertheless, 3 out of 10 owners do not impose the law in their restaurants. They claim that in the beginning of the implementation customers left their restaurant and there was a clear decrease in their revenues. Additionally, their reservations were 50% lower at that period, therefore they decided to ignore the law. Similarly, Marlow (2010) in his study found that the smoking ban in restaurants has an economic effect in the revenues of the businesses. As 7 restaurant owners in the study agree, as their revenues decreased dramatically since September 2010. They state that they mainly rearranged the area and made proper changes, such as glass doors that can open any time it is necessary to get rid of the smoke. The enforcement of the smoking law in outdoor areas is very difficult since laws banning tobacco smoking are only applicable in indoor areas (Vardavas and Kafatos, 2006). This therefore excludes the larger areas in most venues, since most need only a small indoor area for their clientele in winter.

They also propose that their customers have limited their reservations not only because of the economic downturn, but also because they cannot smoke in the restaurant. In fact, the majority of the interviewees claim that the authorities have visited their premises more than one time per week and have already given fines in 4 of them.

They claim that they try with other ways to attract customers, for example they have offers in prices. However, they all support the view that there should be restaurants for smokers and non-smokers so that everyone is happy, and they would not suffer from the implementation of the law. Similarly, Dunham and Marlow (2000) in their study found that some owners find it profitable to allow smoking in their establishments, whereas others prefer to invest in partitions or designated areas. Similarly, Lambert (2006:37) claims that “there is no need for government to force establishments to go nonsmoking, the market will provide an optimal number of nonsmoking choices”. On the other hand, the restaurant owners state that they are afraid of the competition as some of their competitors do not impose the smoking law. As an immediate reaction, smokers customers will prefer their competitors' restaurants in order to have their dinner. “Still customers need more time in order to get used to the new smoking law” claimed one restaurant owner.

5. Conclusion

Many have reacted since the implementation of the smoking law in restaurants in Greece, both customers and restaurant owners. Previous studies both in international level and in Greece come to agree with the dissatisfaction that restaurant owners had. Firstly, the economic downturn has led many owners to shut down their businesses and after the implementation of the smoking law they believe that the Greek government wishes to harm their businesses. In fact, Lambert (2006) suggests that the losses are beyond the control of the owners and the employees, as the law forces them to bear the costs. Glantz & Smith (1999) and Kunzill et al (2003) suggest that there is no evidence that the implementation of the smoking law has decreased the revenue of restaurants, however they claim that the consumption of food and drinks has increased.

The study suggests that Greek restaurant owners do not impose the smoking law actively as in the first days, since their revenues have decreased. In addition, the rearrangement of the seats and the separate areas are inefficient in small restaurants as the smoke will still bother non smokers customers. In view to this, Vardavas et al (2006) propose in their study that even in venues that they had open space, the air was polluted and elevated in almost all their measurements. The glass door that was the main solution of the restaurant owners in this research seems to be the most efficient and effective way to impose the smoking law, however there are challenges especially in the winter.

On the other hand, the non-smokers in the study suggest that they would not limit their consumption of food and drinks after the imposition of the smoking law. Furthermore, their frequency of visits on a weekly basis is more than the smokers show. Interestingly, other studies propose that eventually all customers, smokers or not will return to their old habits and will visit the restaurants and bars in the same way and frequency they did before the implementation of the smoking law. This study affirms the study by Roseman (2006) in Kentucky, who came to similar conclusions and claims that there are few differences in dining out behaviour between the smokers and the non-smokers.

This study proposes that the measurement of the impact on the restaurants should be done in the same restaurants before and after the law and have numeric data on how the smoking law has influenced their revenues and the consumption.

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