

Smoking: The Puffers & The Tolerants

(Part 1 of 4)

A World Health Organization study (Tobacco Atlas 2002) concluded that cigarette consumption has declined by 31.5% in the United States, yet the production of cigarettes there has actually risen by 8%. Many studies indicate that this is a result of the increase in cigarette consumption elsewhere in the world. In the Middle East, for example, studies show that cigarette consumption has been increasing in most of the region over the past 20 years, though the rates vary considerably. In addition, there is a higher historical smoking rate among men than women owing to social traditions and conditions (WHO 2002). New forms of promotion and aggressive use of old forms are creating new markets for cigarettes. Nowadays, tobacco company advertisements target women as well as adolescents. Consequently, *Information International* set out to investigate smoking and smokers in Lebanon. This is the first of a four-part analysis.

Overview of Smokers

The study reveals that 40% of those surveyed are current smokers, out of which 61.3% are males. The remaining 60% of the sample was divided between occasional smokers (15.3%), former smokers (17.3%), and those who have never smoked (27.3%). Notably, there are more former female smokers than there are male (53.8% females vs. 46.2% males), especially in the 25–34 age bracket.

The sample shows that 32.5% of 15–24 year olds are current smokers. In comparison, a 1999 *Information International* study conducted with university students indicated that 29% of respondents were smokers. This accentuates the finding that a considerable percentage of respondents in the younger generation are current smokers.

As shown in Graph 1, younger males (15–

24 year olds) are more likely to be smokers than young females. However, between the ages of 35 and 44, the roles are reversed and females are more likely to be smokers.

Research shows that the poor and less educated have not experienced the same degree of reduction in smoking rates as the upper, educated classes (WHO 2002).

Correspondingly, Graph 2 indicates that there are more former smokers in the lower levels of education. The graph also reveals a positive correlation between higher education levels and percentage of respondents that have never smoked.

Smoking in the Work Place

Only 26.2% of those surveyed stated that smoking is prohibited in their work place, out of which the majority (63.4%) were services and sales employees, as shown in Graph 3. However, 49.2% of services and sales employees surveyed are current smokers, and this category made up the largest proportion of current smokers, or 12.7% of the sample. It should also be noted that the largest proportion of respondents (18.8%) indicated that they were employed in the services and sales sector.

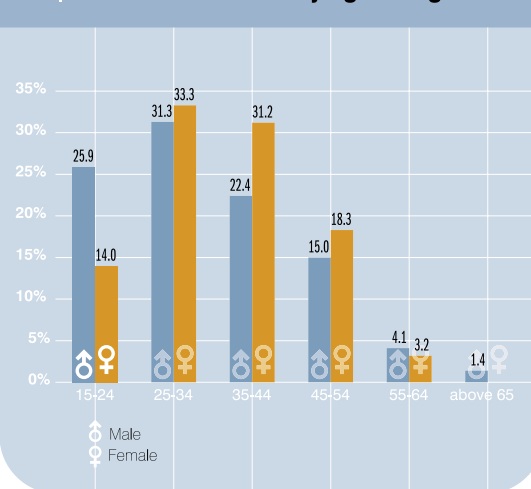
Smoking at Home

The study shows that only 9.5% of the entire sample lives in a household where smoking is not allowed anywhere, while 27.7% live in households where smoking is allowed in some places, and 62.8% live in a home where smoking is allowed everywhere.

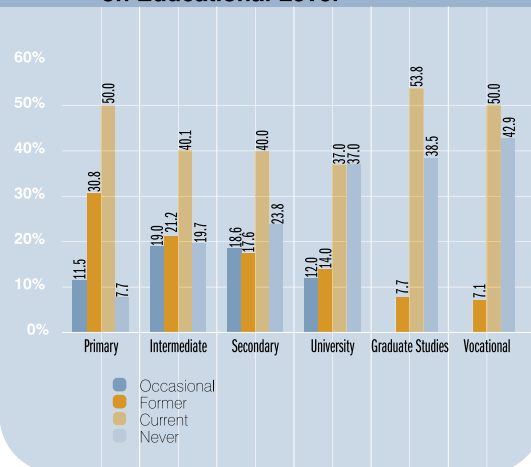
An equal percentage of respondents with an Intermediate, Secondary and University degree (10% of each) live in a household in which smoking is not allowed anywhere. On the other hand, only 8% of the respondents who have a graduate degree live in a no-smoking allowed household. In comparison, 46% live in a household where smoking is allowed in some places and an



G1 | Current Smokers by age and gender



G2 | Smoking Habits by on Educational Level



equal 46% live in a 'smoking is allowed everywhere' home.

Hence, it can be concluded that the educational level does not reflect whether or not a household is smoke-free. The case may be that the parents or elders of the household are smokers and, thus, there are no rules against smoking in the home.

Moreover, of the 62.8% that indicated smoking is allowed everywhere in their homes, 39.5% have a secondary degree and a close 32.4% have a university degree. Surprisingly, the lowest percentages come from respondents with a graduate degree and those with a primary degree or lower, 1% and 2.3% respectively. The breakdown is shown in Graph 4.

Smoking in Other Places

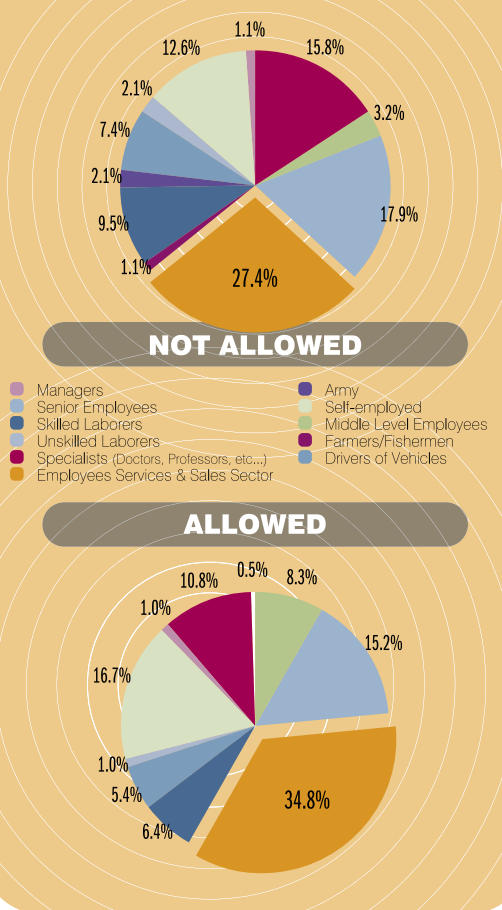
An interesting result to note is that the sample seems to be split between favoring and disapproving of smoking in restaurants. Most of the sample is against smoking in: indoor work areas (78.8%), indoor shopping areas/malls (78.3%) and university campuses (75.5%). And a remarkable 89.8% are against smoking in public transport vehicles. (See Graph 5)

So, how do the high disapproval rates translate into practice, where smoking is still allowed in most indoor work places, shopping areas/malls, university campuses and public transport vehicles?

The answer, according to some analysts, is that the Lebanese people have a high tolerance for practices that bother them. So, even though most respondents oppose smoking in various places, many also said they do not mind being around smokers (65.8%). Furthermore, out of the respondents who have never smoked, 29.3% do not mind being around smokers, compared with 58.7% of former smokers and 89.1% of occasional smokers. Accordingly, analysts point to this tolerance as the reason why no action has been taken to make most public places smoke-free.

The next issue of Ii Monthly will assess why smokers smoke, when they started smoking regularly, how much they smoke and whether their smoking habits are affected by seasonal changes and their surroundings (smoking or non-smoking).

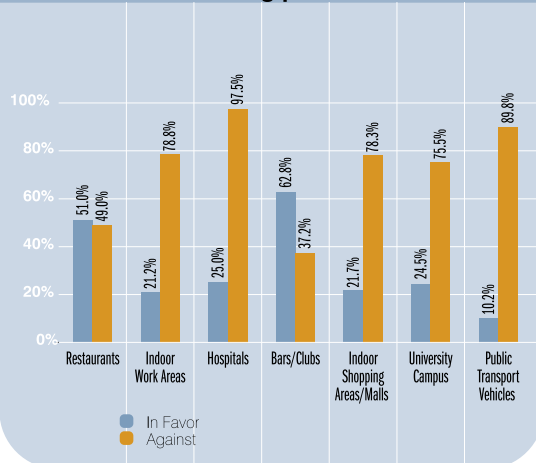
G3 | Is Smoking allowed at your place of work



Sample & Methodology

This survey, based on a stratified random sample of 600 respondents in the Greater Beirut area, was conducted between 14 and 26 October 2004. The survey had a margin of error of $\pm 1.9\%$. Respondents' gender distribution was 50% males & 50% females, while age distribution was as follows: 26.2% between 15–24 years, 31% between 25–34 years, 21.8% between 35–44 years, 15.5% between 45–54 years, 4.5% between 55–64 years, & 1% above the age of 65.

G5 | What is your position on smoking in the following places



G4 | What are the rules regarding smoking at your home?

