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Smoke-Free Policy in Vermont Public Housing Authorities

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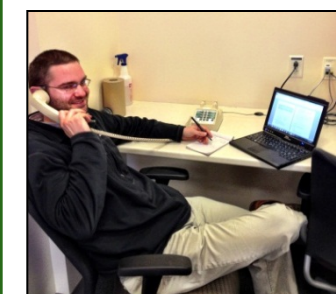
C. Hackett, J. Hood, J. Lane, E. Laryea - Walker, T. Lemay, A. Paine, M. Squiers, R. Ryan, and D. Kaminsky

Introduction

The harmful effects of secondhand smoke have been widely documented.¹ In addition to exposure from smokers in the home, individuals who live in multi-unit housing face risks of exposure from other building tenants.² Public Housing provides a unique view of this issue since tenants often have little opportunity to move into a different building.³ With more than 7 million people in the United States living in public housing, and 40% of units housing families with children, secondhand smoke can cause major morbidity and contribute to poor quality of life.⁴ Past studies have also found that the experiences of the residents does not always match the expectation of the management.⁵ We designed this study to assess the current status of smoking in public housing in Vermont, to assess barriers faced by residents and managers, and to set the stage for a shift to smoke-free policy. We gathered information on the entire state and then, using Burlington Housing Authority (BHA) as a sub-sample, gathered information from tenants and managers.

Methods

We took a two-armed approach for data acquisition:



Arm 1
 Demographic information about Public Housing Authorities in Vermont
 Data collected via structured phone interviews and Housing Authority websites

Arm 2a
 Current BHA smoke-free policy and experiences regarding its implementation /enforcement
 Data collected via structured interviews of two BHA building managers

Arm 2b
 Demographics and tenants' opinions about smoke-free policy
 Data collected via a survey given to BHA tenants and administered over two days



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Statewide Public Housing Authorities Data (Arm 1)

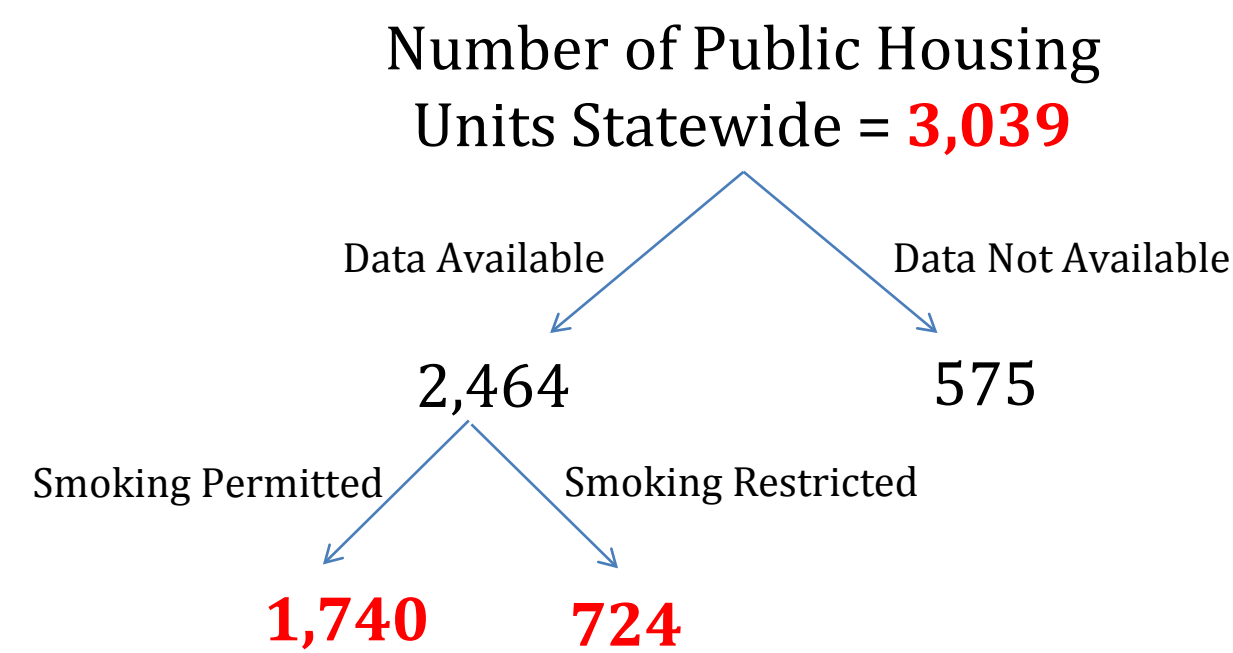


Figure 1. Statewide smoke-free policies

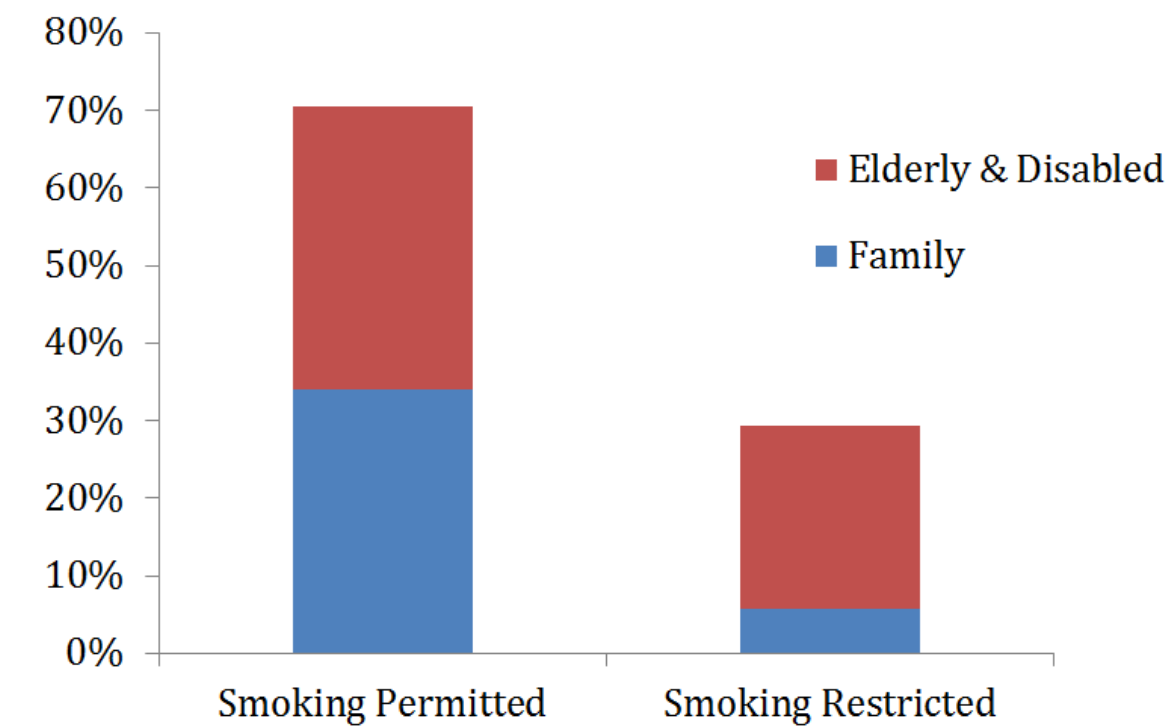


Figure 2. Residents protected by smoke-free policies

Burlington Public Housing Authority Data (Arms 2a & 2b)

Age (yrs)	Number (%)
25-44	12 (25.5)
45-54	6 (12.2)
55-64	16 (32.7)
65+	15 (30.6)

Smoking Status	Number (%)
Current	17 (34.7)
Past	12 (24.5)
Never	20 (40.8)

Move-in Date	Number (%)
Before Policy	37 (75.5)
After Policy	11 (22.4)
No Response	1 (2.0)

Table 1. Participant demographics

"It's difficult to find sufficient evidence to convince the judge someone is smoking"

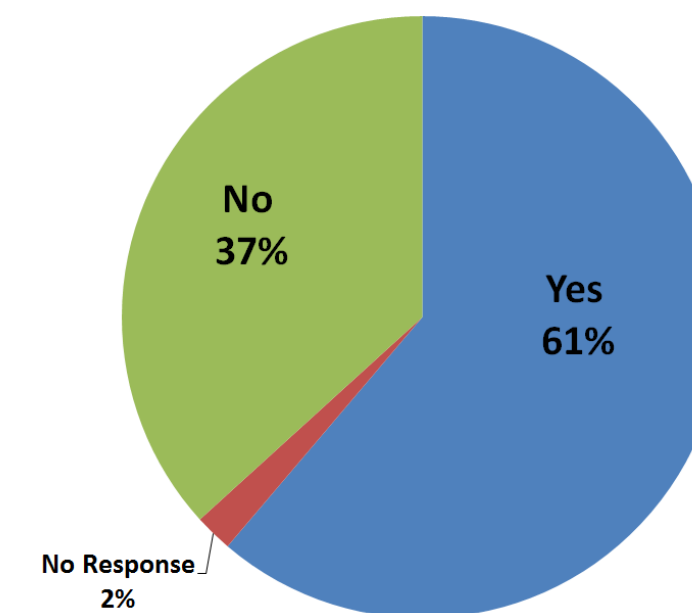


Figure 3. To the best of your knowledge, does any tobacco smoking take place in your building? n=49

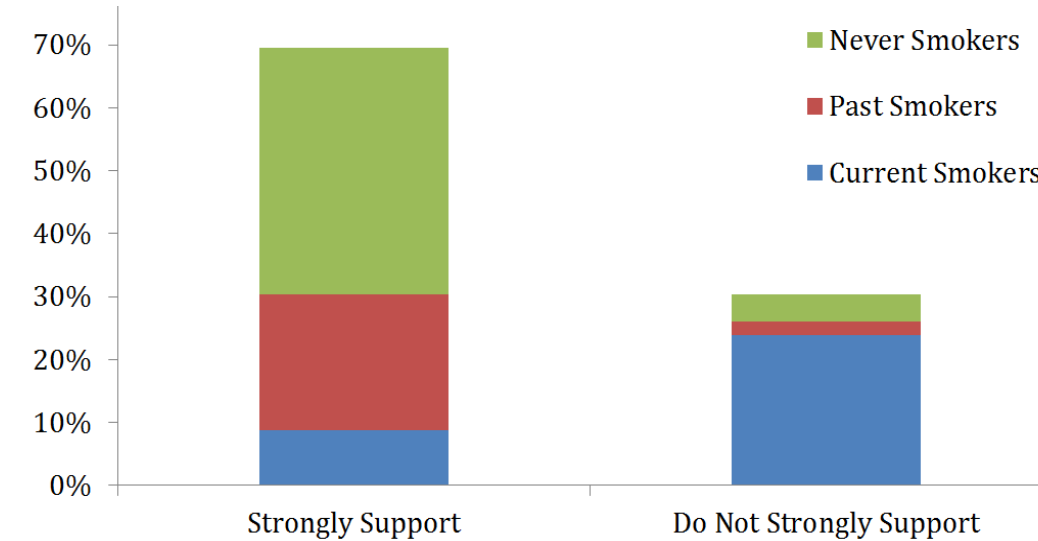


Figure 4. Support for smoke-free policy n = 46 Analyzed by χ^2 test (p < 0.0001)

"Secondhand smoke is highly unhealthy"

"I'm a smoker for sixty years and not about to quit tomorrow"

Results & Discussion

Statewide Housing Authority Survey (Arm 1)

- There are 9 multi-unit Public Housing Authorities in Vermont encompassing over 3,000 individual units
 - Smoking permitted in the majority of VT Public Housing (Fig. 1)
 - Existing smoke-free policy in Vermont public housing covers more elderly/disabled housing than family housing (Fig. 2)
- Anecdotally, housing authorities that reported successful implementation of a smoke-free policy made significant accommodations for current smokers

Burlington Housing Authority Surveys

- Manager Structured Interview (Arm 2a)
 - Difficult enforcement of smoke-free policy due to the burden of proof required to evict
 - > Multi-violation process for non-compliant tenants
 - > Final eviction disputes must be settled in a court of law
 - > Additional enforcement options include cameras and tobacco smoke detectors, but these are costly
 - Unexpected expenses incurred by a smoke-free policy include more frequent rug replacement and elevator maintenance due to increased traffic through public areas
 - Compliance has improved over time and is now >90%
 - Since the smoke-free buildings mostly house the elderly and disabled, managers have faced criticism about mobility-impaired smokers
- Tenant Survey (Arm 2b)
 - Over a third of surveyed tenants (n=49) in smoke-free buildings are current smokers (Table 1)
 - > Current smokers are less likely to support the smoke-free policy compared to never-smokers or past-smokers
 - 61% of tenants report smoking takes place in their buildings and 50% are 'somewhat' or 'very' bothered by it (Fig. 4)
 - > Four out of 49 (8%) tenants admit to smoking inside

Conclusion

Our study highlights the significant paucity of smoke-free policies in public housing buildings in the state of Vermont. Our results indicate that public housing units designated for elderly and disabled tenants are more frequently protected by smoke-free policy than units housing families. Our survey identifies several obstacles to successful implementation of a smoke-free policy. Although tenant smoking cessation is an ideal goal, our results indicate adherence to policies will likely increase if accommodations for smoking tenants, such as designated outdoor spaces, are provided. The results of our study will be used by the American Lung Association to help housing agencies develop successful smoke-free policies.