

## Community awareness and perception of smoking ban at eateries in Pedas, Negeri Sembilan

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### ABSTRACT

Malaysia has enforced a nationwide smoking ban to the public at all eateries on the 1st of January 2019. A survey on the awareness and perception towards this ban among adults was carried out in Pedas, Negeri Sembilan. Preliminary findings were assuring. A total of 91.3% (n = 347, N = 380) of the respondents were aware of this ban. Among the respondents, a low percentage of them were smokers, 29.2% (n = 111). A median of 285.5 respondents (75.1%, IQR = 58.25), including the smokers, perceived that this ban brings about health benefits to self and their family when environmental tobacco smoke exposure is curbed.

*Key words: passive smoking; smoke exposure; legislation; adults; rural area.*

Today, smoking not only contributes to around one-fifth of hospitalisations in Malaysia, but also possesses a threat to the general wellbeing of its surrounding society and nation, irrespective of its citizens' ethnicity, religion, economical status and cultural background.<sup>1</sup> Given that around 20% of Malaysians are smokers, it is an undeniable fact that this habit is injurious not only to the health of smokers themselves, but to the general public too, as a consequence of secondhand smoking. Exposure to secondhand smoking has become a detrimental risk factor that exposes the remaining 80% of non-smokers in Malaysia to respiratory illnesses, such as asthma. Secondhand smoke has also been a factor that has been the cause of non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, and lung cancer, as well as elevating the risks of acquiring strokes. It is estimated that about 7.6 million Malaysians are exposed to second hand smoke in their homes, around 2.3 million Malaysian adults are exposed to indoor second hand smoke at their workplace, and almost 8.6 million people are exposed to second hand smoke in eateries. There are reports that imply individuals frequently exposed to second-hand smoke are 25–30% more likely to develop heart diseases than individuals who are not exposed to secondhand smoke.<sup>2</sup> In addition, it has led to the deaths of around twenty-seven thousand Malaysians

each year, from a statistical study conducted by the American Cancer Society. It was during this time that the Malaysian government became a party of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Smoking (FCTC) in 2005, which protects the public from exposure to cigarette smoke.<sup>3</sup>

On 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2019, Malaysia has enforced a nationwide smoking ban to the public at all eateries. This ban was part of the Ministry of Health's strategies to fight against non-communicable diseases, protect Malaysians against passive smoke and encourage them to practice healthy lifestyles, reduce the consumption of cigarettes and tobacco products in Malaysia, which indirectly convinces smokers to quit the nicotine habit, in hopes that Malaysia becomes a smoke-free nation by 2045. Previously, the Control of Tobacco Product Regulations in 2017 restricts the areas where smoking is allowed, which includes public parks, air-conditioned shops and work offices. The control of tobacco is regulated under the Food Act of 1983 that reinforces the presence of smoke free environments. Currently, the Ministry of Health has issued the Declaration of Non-Smoking Area 2011, 2012, 2015, which declares additional specified buildings and places as smoke free.<sup>4</sup> This ban, however, is not new as there are many other countries worldwide which have implemented it. In accordance with the WHO Non Communicable Diseases Global Target, Malaysia is required to reduce its smoking prevalence to about 15% by the year 2025.<sup>5</sup> The nationwide smoking ban to the public at all eateries could be a good start to augment the previous and current measures imposed. A team of Semester 5 MBBS students from International Medical University (IMU) decided to conduct a preliminary study on the awareness and perception towards this newly implemented ban among adults in the rural community of Pedas, Negeri Sembilan as part of their community health survey project.

A cross-sectional survey was carried out from 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2019. Pedas is one of the 17 mukims in the district of Rembau, Negeri Sembilan which borders the state of Melaka in the south. Sampling was conducted within a quadrant of 3.5km radius with Klinik Kesihatan

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(KK) Pedas as the centre. The sampling size was calculated with Raosoft software, basing on a margin error of 5% and confidence level of 95%. The estimated population size (N) was 14,000. The calculated sample required was 380, with an attrition rate of 20%. The inclusion criteria for this study were Malaysian adults, aged 18 years and above, both sexes of all ethnicities, as well as both smokers and non-smokers. Respondents must also be able to answer to the survey questions in Bahasa Melayu or English. The exclusion criteria were respondents who were mentally incompetent and houses which were locked with no occupants during the survey period. The survey questions to measure the awareness on smoking ban was done with dichotomous questions, whilst the perception towards the smoking ban was measured using the Likert-type scale questions. The independent variables were the demographics of the adults of Pedas Community, aged 18 years and above, as well as gender, educational levels and smoking and non-smoking status.

The percentage of awareness of the community in Pedas, Negeri Sembilan towards the enforcement of the new smoking ban in eateries is high at a 91.3% (n = 347). Possible explanation may be due to the heavier media coverage and the compulsory display of warning signs at eateries in Malaysia. There is however, less awareness, 77.1% (n = 293) on the 3 metre distance from eateries where smoking is allowed. This could be due to the 'No Smoking' signs and warnings at eateries not displaying that specific information. A little more than half the respondents, 59.2% (n = 225) agree that they would spend more time in eateries since the introduction of the ban. This depicts the respondents appreciating a smoke free ambience. On the overall perceptions on the ban, a median of 285.5 respondents (75.1%, IQR

= 58.25), including the smokers, are agreeable that this ban brings about health benefits to self and their family when environmental tobacco smoke exposure is curbed. The positive perceptions of the ban by the respondents may be due to their belief that secondhand smoking is a serious threat to health or presumably the respondents have a generally negative attitude towards passive smoking and that it is hazardous towards one's health. Interestingly, 72.1% (n = 274) of the respondents agreed to the fact that this smoking ban would lead to a decrease in obtaining non-communicable diseases. It is a fair assumption of the population of Pedas to agree to the fact that disease prevalence would be lower as the effects of smoking can usually be detrimental. This could also be linked to the good level of awareness shown by respondents regarding the effects of smoking on the environment and their health.

In conclusion, it is widely known and an agreed fact that smoking poses a grave threat to the current and future health implications of the Malaysian population. It is assuring that this preliminary survey found that there was a widespread knowledge of the smoking ban across the Pedas adults' community regardless of an individual's socioeconomic background. However, the distance enforced by the ban was not as widely known by the respondents. Perhaps, this could be addressed in the future awareness campaigns of the ban. While the ban has shown promising results in population awareness, it has only been introduced in the last few months thus, the effects of it are yet to be seen. Future studies could investigate the correlation between the number of fines and number of smokers to assess the effectiveness of the newly implemented law. However, that being said, it can be concluded that the aim of this preliminary survey was achieved.

**Table 1: Awareness questionnaire (N = 380)**

Questions	No		Yes	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Do you usually eat out?	113	29.7%	267	70.3%
Are you aware of the smoking ban in eateries which took effect from 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2019?	33	8.7%	347	91.3%
Are you aware that there is an enforced distance around eateries in this ban?	86	22.6%	294	77.4%
It is important to have a smoke-free environment.	37	9.7%	343	90.3%
The environment seems cleaner after enforcing smoking ban. (e.g. less cigarette butts)	64	16.8%	316	83.2%
Secondhand smoke is a serious threat to health.	29	7.6%	351	92.4%
The fine of RM10,000 for the public and RM2,500 for eatery owners are heavy enough.	82	21.6%	298	78.4%

**Table 2: Perception questionnaire (N = 380)**

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
The recent smoking ban will force smokers to reduce the number of cigarettes they smoke.	34	8.9%	55	14.5%	38	10.0%	135	35.5%	118	31.1%
The recent smoking ban reduces exposure to passive smoking in eateries.	15	3.9%	17	4.5%	29	7.6%	172	45.3%	147	38.7%
The current smoking ban is able to create a healthier environment.	17	4.5%	15	3.9%	33	8.7%	131	34.5%	184	48.4%
The smoking ban is not a violation of the smokers' right.	34	8.9%	43	11.3%	50	13.2%	98	25.8%	155	40.8%
There is a need for more notices in place for the smoking ban in eateries.	18	4.7%	29	7.6%	48	12.6%	130	34.2%	155	40.8%
The introduction of signboards (public place warning) of smoking ban will be helpful (e.g. No Smoking)	17	4.5%	31	8.2%	42	11.1%	144	37.9%	146	38.4%
Eating in eateries has become more pleasant with smoking ban in place.	23	6.1%	23	6.1%	53	13.9%	119	31.3%	162	42.6%
The time spent at eateries will be longer after the smoking ban.	33	8.7%	40	10.5%	82	21.6%	119	31.3%	106	27.9%
The smoking ban will have long-term benefits to the general public's health.	12	3.2%	15	3.9%	24	6.3%	141	37.1%	188	49.5%
Smoking is a habit that causes financial burden.	25	6.6%	23	6.1%	32	8.4%	126	33.2%	174	45.8%
The smoking ban encourages smokers to quit smoking.	44	11.6%	49	12.9%	62	16.3%	105	27.6%	120	31.6%
Smoking ban in eateries (together with other public places) lower your chance of getting non-communicable diseases (such as heart problems, diabetes, high blood pressure, etc.) over time.	21	5.5%	31	8.2%	54	14.2%	115	30.3%	159	41.8%

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