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UCT study finds that most restaurant owners support a complete ban on smoking in restaurants

South Africa's anti-smoking measures are about to get tougher. Big Tobacco may have intensified its marketing blitz in the developing world, but South Africa's Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi, isn't having any of it. At the World Conference on Tobacco or Health held in Cape Town recently, Motsoaledi announced a 100% ban on smoking in public areas. This means that the dedicated smoking areas in restaurants and other hospitality establishments will no longer be available.

A University of Cape Town (UCT) study seeking to find out if South Africans are ready for this ban found that most restaurant owners and managers are supporting a complete ban on smoking in restaurants. The study, which canvassed views in South Africa's restaurant industry, was published by the *South African Medical Journal*.

Megan Little, a researcher in the Economics of Tobacco Control Project (ETCP) and Professor Corné van Walbeek, director of the ETCP, embarked on a study to analyse the smoking policies of restaurants, whether and how these policies have changed over the past decade, and restaurateurs' attitudes to the proposed legislative changes. (The ETCP is a project of the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) at UCT's School of Economics.)

More than 750 restaurants across all South Africa were interviewed for the study.

Little elaborates: "Whereas there was massive pushback from the hospitality and tobacco industries some 20 years ago when the idea of a complete ban on smoking in hospitality establishments was first floated, attitudes appear to have changed today. We found that the majority of restaurant owners and managers support the proposed amendment that would ban smoking in restaurants completely."

A noticeable number of restaurants are already voluntarily instituting a complete ban on smoking regardless of the current regulation's more lenient stance on smoking. Already 45% of restaurants have no smoking areas at all. The practise is more prevalent in franchise establishments where 57% of franchisers do not allow their restaurants to have smoking areas at all. Meanwhile, 44% of restaurants have smoking areas outside. Just 11% of restaurants have smoking areas inside.

There is a clear distinction in preference between South Africa's rural and urban provinces. Restaurants with inside smoking areas tend to be in small towns and rural provinces. Non-smoking restaurants, or restaurants with outside smoking areas, are prevalent in provinces with large urban populations. Regional variances in the study may be indicative of differing consumer lifestyle choices between rural and urban South Africa.

Prof Van Walbeek says: "There's been a shift for the better in restaurants' smoking policies in the past decade. Businesses all over the world respond to consumer preferences and the hospitality industry is no different."

The study found that 23% of restaurants have changed their smoking policies in the last 10 years, with the majority relocating their smoking sections outside or banning smoking completely. There was little evidence of customer disapproval to these changes.

"The fact that restaurants voluntarily adjusted their smoking policies in the past decade, in some cases taking a tougher stance than the law requires, is indicative of the healthier lifestyle demands of urban restaurant patrons. This suggests that a significant number of South Africans are ready for the ban on restaurant smoking," Van Walbeek concludes.

Notes to editors

For the full study on smoking in South African restaurants, click [here](#).

To access the South African restaurant perceptions on proposed smoke-free law, click [here](#).

To read more about the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit, click [here](#).

To read more about SALDRU's Economics of Tobacco Control Project, please click [here](#).

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