

Background

In 2013, Vietnam implemented the Law on Prevention and Control of Tobacco Harms (No. 09/2012/QH13, referred to as the tobacco control law), which prohibited smoking in public places, including restaurants, hotels, and hospitals. Venues are required to enforce specific prohibitions and are also required to place ‘no smoking’ signs at places where smoking is not allowed. Previous studies assessing restaurants and hotels found low compliance across Vietnam, particularly in low-income or low-tourism areas. Vietnam’s experience implementing smoke-free laws may reflect broader tobacco control dynamics observed in many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Methods

From May–July 2025, we conducted semi-structured key informant interviews with 36 owners, managers, or administrators of restaurants, hotels, and hospitals. Interviews took place in three cities across Vietnam: Hanoi, Nha Trang, and Da Lat. These cities were purposively selected to represent different geographic locations in Vietnam and different city sizes.

For restaurants and hotels, high and low tourism areas in each city were purposively identified for recruitment. For hospitals, two hospitals with the highest patient volume in each city were selected to participate.

Overall, 18 interviews were completed with restaurant owners or managers (six per city); 12 interviews were completed with hotel owners or managers (four per city), and six interviews were completed with hospital administrators (two per city).

Data collectors followed a semi-structured interview guide and explored participants’ knowledge of smoke-free laws, current implementation practices, experience with government enforcement visits, and recommendations to improve implementation of smoke-free laws.

Key Findings

Knowledge of smoke-free laws



- Knowledge of the law varied across key informants; for those aware of the law, many did not know the details of the regulations.

Implementation facilitators



- Protecting health of women and children was an important motivating value for venues that had smoke-free policies.
- Signs were used by all venues with a smoke-free policy as a visual guide to enhance compliance.
- Venues with smoke-free policies frequently used camera surveillance and staff patrols to monitor for violations.
- Venues with smoke-free policies used proactive (informing customers of rules at check-in) and reactive (gentle reminders) approaches to reduce smoking where it was not allowed.
- Across venues, fire safety prevention was used as a rationale for restricting smoking inside.
- Training staff on smoke-free policies and how to handle violations was common across venues.

Interviews of up to 60 minutes were conducted online in Vietnamese.

Audio recordings were transcribed in Vietnamese, checked for quality and translated into English.

English transcripts were coded and analyzed for themes.

Thematic analysis of identified patterns and major themes within and across venue type.

Implementation barriers



- Accommodating customers who smoke, particularly VIPs, was seen as providing good customer service across venues.
- There was concern about loss of revenue if venues fined customers who smoke.
- Across venues, there was resistance to fine customers and knowledge about the process and authority of the venue to collect customer fines was limited.

Enforcement inspection experience



- Across venues, fire safety inspections were most common and the fire inspection department often reviewed fire safety equipment and signs.
- In interviews, venue management reported inconsistent frequency of inspections from none to quarterly or annually.

Ways to improve implementation



- Venue owners and managers recommended clarity on who fined venues and individuals and how/when fines are collected.
- Venue owners and managers recommended mass communication campaigns to alert venues and the public to where smoking is not allowed indoors under the law and the associated fines for venues and individuals found in violation of the smoke-free law.

Noteable Quotes

“After we banned it, many customers didn’t return. However, the number of customers who return is because our restaurant is non-smoking. Families who don’t like smoking come to a restaurant that doesn’t smell of cigarettes. That’s a huge plus.”

Hanoi restaurant, low tourism

“First, during check-in, our staff reminds each guest that their room is non-smoking, and a notice is also placed inside the room. Guests tend to pay attention because they’re aware there’s a fine involved — it’s a common psychological trigger.”

*Nha Trang hotel,
high tourism*

“Financial penalties, the restaurant can’t do that; that requires the police...[to] have enough authority to fine.”

*Da Lat restaurant,
low tourism*

“I just remind them not to smoke in the room because smoking in the room will set off the fire alarm, which blares loudly and affects other rooms.”

Da Lat hotel, low tourism

“In essence, I haven’t seen anyone being fined, meaning not just at the hospital, but they aren’t fined anywhere, so in their minds, they don’t even think about being fined; they just get reminded by others.”

Hanoi hospital