

Achieving Smoke-free Apartment Outdoor Area Policies in Asian/Pacific Islander Neighborhoods of Central Los Angeles

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Abstract Attempting to achieve non-smoking outdoor area policies in apartment complexes of Central Los Angeles Asian/Pacific Islander neighborhoods, People’s CORE, a community based organization, partnered with a professional evaluator for a three year campaign. Focus group discussion results with residents showed readiness as well as hesitation towards non-smoking policies. Through community organizing, focus group discussions with tenants and one-on-one education outreach activities to apartment managers, the organization managed to have 20 apartment complexes adopt and implement policies for smoking restrictions in their common outdoor areas. Pre- and post observations at 52 apartment complexes showed statistically significant reduction of tobacco litter in parking areas/garages, entrance ways, courtyards, and balcony/walkway/community rooms. The authors attribute the success of the project in part to the long-standing good reputation of People’s CORE as a community mobilizer and organizer.

Keywords Asian Pacific Islanders · Smoke-free apartment complexes · Tobacco control · Voluntary · Non-smoking policy

Background

While the overall smoking rate among the Asian/Pacific Islander (API) population in California is low (3.8 %), the rate among API males is high (12.8 %) [1]. Tang et al. [6] report a smoking rate of 35.9 % in Korean males, 31.6 % in Vietnamese males, and 24.4 % in Filipino males [6]. This means that non-smokers in API households and communities experience high exposure rates to secondhand smoke, the smoke from others’ cigarettes. Categorized by the California Air Resources Board as a toxic air contaminant [2], secondhand smoke accounts for approximately 10 % of deaths from smoking in the United States [3].

In urban areas, many Asians/Pacific Islanders are particularly vulnerable because as renters they can be exposed to secondhand smoke from others’ patios, decks or shared outdoor spaces, and from “seepage” through walls and ventilation systems, through open doors and windows, and even through electrical wiring outlets and plumbing systems [5]. People living in apartment complexes are more likely to be exposed to secondhand smoke than those living in single family homes [4]. This raises a disparity issue for low income renters. It became the target of a health campaign in Central Los Angeles between 2007 and 2010.

People’s Community Organization for Reform and Empowerment (People’s CORE) works with API communities in Los Angeles to address social inequities in housing, the environment and community health [7] through outreach, political organizing to effect policy changes, and providing education and referral services. In 2007 the

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organization received funding from the California Department of Public Health's Tobacco Control Program, to get a minimum of 20 apartment complexes in Central Los Angeles to adopt and implement voluntary policies designating common outdoor areas such as laundry rooms, playgrounds, walkways, etc. as smoke-free. The target of 20 was chosen because it seemed attainable given resources and a three year timeframe. The goal of this study was to assess the association of People's CORE's community intervention with the adoption of smoke-free outdoor area multiunit housing policies and a reduction in tobacco litter.

Method

Table 1 shows the timeline for the intervention and evaluation activities.

People's CORE used a participatory approach for its campaign. Community members were involved in decision making and data collection. A professional evaluator trained staff and volunteers to conduct process and outcome evaluation activities.

To guide outreach and education efforts, People's CORE conducted three focus groups with apartment residents, a telephone survey with 69 apartment managers and in-depth phone interviews with 22 of these. Outcomes were measured by the number of voluntary smoke-free policies passed and by the number of complexes free of observed tobacco litter. Pre- and posttest observations were conducted in all 52 complexes in the sample, indicating the presence or absence of tobacco litter (cigarette butts or

tobacco packaging) in parking areas/garages, entrances, laundry rooms, hallways/corridors, playgrounds, and other locations. Pretest assessments were administered January–May 2008 and posttests in January–May 2010.

Descriptive statistics and content analysis were used to analyze the results from surveys and interviews with apartment managers and focus group discussions. Observation data were entered into SPSS and analyzed by using descriptive statistics and paired t-tests.

Intervention and Results

The campaign began with a community forum to explain the project to community members, who helped identify a convenience sample of 69 apartment complexes in the area. People's CORE sent a survey to the owners/managers of these complexes to assess how many already had smoke-free policies. Of the 69 that were initially contacted, 52—ranging in size from 2 to 332 units—had no policies restricting tobacco use. These became the target of the intervention.

Surveys and interviews of owners/managers indicated that the majority believed that secondhand smoke was harmful to the health of individuals. However, a large number was unsure about whether or not to pursue non-smoking policies due to feasibility and enforcement issues.

To counter these concerns, People's CORE organized a series of focus group discussions to demonstrate that tenants favored such policies. Staff invited a purposive sample of known tenants to these events and had volunteers translate what was said into respective API languages. Focus groups were held in March, April, and May of 2008 with 11, 9, and 11 participants respectively, ranging in age from 22 to 84, whose households had two to nine residents.

Tenants expressed the following views: Some participants shared how pervasive smoking was in their “home country” and expressed doubts about the supposed health risks of smoking. However, most tenants were highly concerned about their health and the effects that secondhand smoke exposure might have on their risk of contracting tobacco-related diseases. Almost all conveyed that regulating air pollution and secondhand smoke would improve their quality of life. A few voiced that smoking bans infringe on others' personal freedom or right to smoke. Participants noted that confronting smokers can sometimes be problematic, so most say nothing in order to avoid conflict. Results of these focus groups were shared with apartment managers as compelling indications of tenant support for smoke-free policies. Interested parties were provided with assistance in drafting policy language.

By the end of the three year campaign, seven of the 52 targeted complexes adopted a smoke-free policy.

Table 1 Campaign Timeline

Year 1	Planning and staff training Create community awareness (ongoing) Community forum (create apartment complex sample of 69) Educate managers and tenants (ongoing) Manager Survey in 69 complexes ↓ Select target complexes (52) ↓ Pre-observation of 52 complexes
Year 2	Create community awareness at events (ongoing) Educate managers and tenants (ongoing) Focus group discussions with tenants ↓ Share focus group results with managers Interview managers
Year 3	Create community awareness at events (ongoing) Educate managers and tenants (ongoing) Policy and lease review of 20 complexes that adopted policy Post observation in 52 complexes

Table 2 Pretest versus posttest: number of areas with tobacco litter

Locations	Pretest			Posttest		
	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	N/A n (%)	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	N/A n (%)
Parking area/garage	11 (21.1)	20 (38.5)	21 (40.4)	0 (0)	33 (63.5)	19 (36.5)
Entrance	9 (17/3)	19 (36.5)	24 (46.2)	0 (0)	29 (55.8)	23 (44.2)
Laundry room	0 (0)	12 (23.1)	40 (76.9)	0 (0)	12 (32.1)	40 (76.9)
Hallways/corridors	1 (1.9)	2 (3.8)	49 (94.2)	0 (0)	6 (11.5)	46 (88.5)
Playgrounds	0 (0)	3 (5.8)	49 (94.2)	0 (0)	4 (7.7)	48 (92.3)
Other (yard/courtyard/patio)	25 (48.1)	11 (21.2)	16 (30.8)	1 (1.9)	35 (67.3)	16 (30.8)
Other (balcony/community room/walkway)	6 (11.6)	1 (1.9)	45 (86.5)	0 (0)	8 (15.4)	44 (84.6)

Interestingly, 13 complexes that were not part of the sample heard about the campaign and requested education on the issue. Their adoption of policies brought the total to the goal of 20. Those complexes that adopted the policies tended to be smaller and have a younger population than those that did not adopt. Conversations with managers that did *not* adopt, indicated that they feared such a policy would be hard to enforce without a city ordinance.

Table 2 shows the observation of tobacco litter in common outdoor areas. Observers interpreted non-observable areas differently at times, which explains the variation in n's in the pre- and post test for N/A (non observable).

The posttest showed almost no tobacco litter in any observed outdoor area. The pre- and post test comparison showed statistically significant reduction of tobacco litter in parking areas/garages ($p < 0.05$), entrance ways ($p < 0.01$), courtyard ($p < 0.01$), and balcony/walkway/community rooms ($p < 0.01$).

Discussion

The campaign was successful in achieving its objective in large part due to the bottom-up, community organizing approach that People's CORE employed. Due to its long-term relationship with members of the API community, People's CORE was already well-known and trusted. The consistent process of building trust and engaging the population in the decision making process was a successful strategy. Therefore, targeting certain apartment complexes was less important for policy adoption success than outreach and broad community involvement, which generated wide interest and support. Many of the residents active in the campaign had already been participating in other People's CORE activities and services for a number of years. Thus, the repeated and prolonged contact over time is what helped to mobilize community members to join a tobacco control project. The constant visibility of People's CORE in the community through the multiple outreach

activities for tobacco control and other causes may have been a deciding factor in attracting apartment complexes that were not initially identified by community members, thus creating a spillover effect.

The purposive selection of the focus group participants limits the conclusions that can be drawn from results. Moreover, outcome data are limited to showing effect without showing the size of the effect since individual litter items were not counted. Finally, litter observation results may contain a bias, since they were part of an internal evaluation.

Possible future smoke-free multiunit housing goals for People's Core are the adoption of policies that restrict indoor smoking in a portion or all individual units. Focusing the intervention on targeted language and cultural groups may be a useful strategy.

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