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Title: Young people and sunbed usage in Cheshire: Upton High School

Date: November 2009

Originally published in:

Example citation: Alford, S., & Perry, C. (2009). *Young people and sunbed usage in Cheshire: Upton High School*. Chester: University of Chester

Version of item: Published version

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/88179>

Young people and sunbed usage in Cheshire

Upton High School

Executive Summary

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November 2009

Summary

Upton High School

1 Introduction

Cases of skin cancer in the United Kingdom have doubled through the 1980s and 1990s. The links between sun bathing, sun burn and skin cancer have been widely examined and it has also been reported that a relationship exists between sunbed usage and skin cancer. These findings have led the World Health Organisation to recommend banning those aged under 18 years from using sunbeds. Against this background, there is currently a dearth of research examining the use of and attitudes towards sunbeds amongst children and young people in the UK.

2 Study design and methodology

The aim of this study was to investigate the use of and attitudes towards sunbeds amongst young people aged 14 to 15 years old in Cheshire. A survey approach was adopted and a questionnaire was administered to 666 Year 10 pupils in four Cheshire schools. Schools were sampled to represent different areas across Cheshire and the survey was undertaken in June 2009. As findings from the four schools were similar, in this summary specific data relating to Upton High School appears first, followed by a summary of the overall findings.

3 Upton High School results

At Upton High School, 161 young people returned a questionnaire, although not every respondent answered every question. In order to explore possible influences on sunbed usage, Table 1 (overleaf) presents the characteristics of Upton High School sunbed users by sex, whether or not they smoked and family use.

As Table 1 illustrates, females were more likely to use sunbeds than males (22% females, 5% males). Smokers were also more likely to use a sunbed. In addition, females were more likely to use sunbeds than males if their family also used sunbeds. It can be seen in Table 1 that out of the 30 females whose family members used sunbeds, 13 (43%) used sunbeds themselves whereas of the 23 males whose families used sunbeds, 3 (13%) did so themselves. Thus it can be hypothesised that females are more influenced by their families than males in relation to sunbed usage.

Table 1 Use of sunbeds by pupils

		%	n
Have you ever used a sunbed – all pupils		13	21/160
Sex	Males	5	4/83
	Females	22	17/77
Smoking	Yes	38	6/16
	Occasionally	22	4/18
	No	9	11/124
Family use sunbeds	Males	13	3/23
	Females	43	13/30
Family don't use sunbeds	Males	2	1/60
	Females	9	4/46

Respondents who had not used sunbed beds were asked if they would consider using one in the future. Table 2 presents the characteristics of Upton High School non-users who indicated that they would consider using a sunbed.

Table 2 Potential use of sunbeds by non users

		%	n
Would consider using a sunbed		22	31/139
Sex	Males	19	15/79
	Females	27	16/60
Smoking	Yes	60	6/10
	Occasionally	14	2/14
	No	20	23/113
Family use sunbeds	Males	40	8/20
	Females	47	8/17
Family don't use sunbeds	Males	12	7/59
	Females	19	8/42

As Table 2 illustrates, 22% of respondents who had not used a sunbed indicated that they would consider using one. Of the 60 females, 16 (27%) indicated that they might use a sunbed whereas of the 79 males, 15 (11%) indicated that they might use a

sunbed. When examining smoking amongst potential sunbed users, smokers were more likely to consider using sunbeds than non-smokers.

Amongst potential sunbed users, females were more likely to consider using sunbeds than males if their family used sunbeds and if their family did not use sunbeds. Those respondents whose families used sunbeds had a higher proportion of respondents who would consider using sunbeds when compared to respondents whose family did not use sunbeds (47% vs. 19% females, 40% vs. 12% males).

In order to gauge attitudes towards sunbeds and tanning, respondents were asked whether they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed or disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with 26 statements relating to the topic. Table 3 (overleaf) displays all of the responses of sunbed users and non-users from Upton High School.

Table 3 Attitudes towards sunbeds and tanning

	Upton sunbed users			Upton non-users		
	SA/A (%)	NS (%)	D/SD (%)	SA/A (%)	NS (%)	D/SD (%)
A tan makes you look healthy	15 (71)	4 (19)	2 (10)	61 (44)	34 (25)	41 (30)
Using a sunbed is a good way to create a 'base tan' before going on holiday	18 (86)	1 (5)	2 (10)	35 (26)	46 (34)	53 (40)
Using a sunbed before going on holiday to a hot country prevents burning when you are there	8 (40)	7 (35)	5 (25)	16 (12)	39 (29)	78 (59)
A tan makes you more attractive	12 (57)	5 (24)	4 (19)	58 (45)	34 (26)	38 (38)
A tan makes you feel more confident	16 (76)	3 (14)	2 (10)	64 (49)	38 (29)	30 (23)
Going on a sunbed makes people feel more relaxed	9 (43)	6 (29)	6 (29)	23 (17)	78 (58)	33 (25)
A tan makes you more popular	1 (5)	1 (5)	18 (90)	10 (7)	28 (21)	97 (72)
Those that are tanned look more attractive than those who have pale skin	7 (39)	4 (22)	7 (39)	43 (33)	26 (20)	62 (47)
Using a sunbed is actually safer than sunbathing outdoors	6 (29)	10 (48)	5 (24)	10 (7)	52 (39)	73 (54)
Sunbeds are harmful	16 (77)	2 (10)	3 (14)	117 (87)	12 (9)	5 (4)
Sunbeds cause skin cancer	15 (75)	3 (15)	2 (10)	117 (86)	14 (10)	5 (4)
Sunbeds make skin wrinkly	10 (50)	6 (30)	4 (20)	81 (60)	49 (36)	5 (4)
Sunbeds give you dry skin	12 (57)	4 (19)	5 (24)	60 (45)	69 (52)	4 (3)

Table 3 Attitudes towards sunbeds and tanning continued....

	Upton sunbed users			Upton non-users		
	SA/A (%)	NS (%)	D/SD (%)	SA/A (%)	NS (%)	D/SD (%)
Sunbeds should not be used by people that have red hair	5 (26)	8 (42)	6 (32)	14 (10)	58 (43)	64 (47)
Sunbeds should not be used by those who have freckles	3 (15)	10 (50)	7 (35)	10 (7)	61 (45)	64 (47)
Sunbeds should not be used by those who have sensitive skin	8 (44)	6 (33)	4 (22)	78 (57)	46 (34)	12 (9)
Sunbeds should not be used by those who are under 16	3 (14)	8 (38)	10 (48)	71 (53)	43 (32)	21 (16)
Using a sunbed more than once a week is too much	8 (38)	6 (29)	7 (33)	78 (59)	44 (33)	10 (8)
Using a sunbed more than once a month is too much	3 (15)	6 (30)	11 (55)	31 (23)	68 (50)	36 (27)
Using a sunbed at all is too much	3 (14)	3 (14)	15 (71)	25 (19)	51 (38)	58 (43)
To use a sunbed at all is dangerous	5 (25)	5 (25)	10 (50)	56 (42)	27 (20)	50 (38)
Sunbeds are completely harmless	4 (21)	2 (11)	13 (68)	4 (3)	17 (13)	113 (84)
There should be a law banning the use of sunbeds by those younger than sixteen	3 (14)	7 (33)	11 (52)	50 (37)	55 (41)	29 (22)
People should be free to use a sunbed as many times as they want	9 (43)	6 (29)	6 (29)	30 (22)	30 (22)	75 (56)
I find that sunbeds are too expensive to use	4 (19)	3 (14)	14 (67)	15 (11)	92 (69)	27 (20)
Using a sunbed is a good treatment for spots on the face and body	13 (65)	7 (35)	0 (0)	25 (19)	64 (47)	46 (34)

4 Overall results

Socio-demographics

- 380 questionnaires were completed (57% response rate).
- 81% of the respondents were aged 15 years.
- 191 (50%) of respondents were female and 189 (50%) were male.

Sunbed usage

- 11% (43/376) of respondents had used a sunbed.
- Females were more likely to use sunbeds than males (19% females, 4% males).
- Smokers were more likely to use a sunbed than non-smokers (31% of smokers, 15% of occasional smokers and 9% of non-smokers).
- 83% of sunbed users reported having six or less sessions in the previous six months.

Sunbed location

- Males were most likely to use sunbeds at home or in a council gym/fitness club.
- Females were most likely to use a sunbed in a salon/shop.
- No differences between the four schools were observed in relation to where respondents used sunbeds.
- 26% (11/41) of sunbed users indicated that they had used an unmanned sunbed, although it is unclear if this includes individuals who had used a sunbed in the home.

Safe use of sunbeds

- 48% (20/42) of sunbed users indicated that they had received advice about sunbed use.
- 56% (10/34) of females always used eye protection.
- 63% (5/8) of males never wore eye protection.
- 9% experienced problems with their eyes following sunbed use.
- 12% experienced problems with their skin following sunbed use.

Potential sunbed users

- 20% of non-users indicated that they would consider using a sunbed.
- Female non-users were more likely to consider using a sunbed than male non-users (31% females, 11% males).

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- Non-users who smoked were more likely to consider using a sunbed than non-smokers.

Sunbed guidelines

- 84% (36/43) of sunbed users were aware of sunbed guidelines compared with 41% (117/327) of non-users.
- 69% of sunbed users and non-users considered that sunbed guidelines would be available in a tanning salon.
- 61% of users and 62% of non-users considered sunbed guidelines to be a good idea.

Attitudes towards sunbeds and tanning

- 48% (174 out of 366) of respondents considered a tan to look healthy.
- 81% (294/362) of respondents considered that sunbeds were harmful.
- 80% (289/363) considered that sunbeds could cause skin cancer.
- 36% (129/355) agreed that using a sunbed at all was dangerous.
- 52% (185/357) considered using a sunbed more than once a week to be too much.
- 20% (70/356) considered using a sunbed more than once a month too much.
- 76% (272/360) agreed that, or were unsure whether, people should be free to use a sunbed as many times as they wanted to.
- 80% (288/358) agreed that, or were unsure whether, sunbeds should not be used by those aged under 16.
- 39% (139/356) agreed there should be a law banning the use of sunbed for those under 16 years of age.
- Sunbed users were more likely than non-users to consider sunbeds in a positive way.
- Both users and non-users generally agreed that 'sunbeds are harmful' and can cause skin cancer.
- Male and female sunbed users shared similar attitudes relating to sunbed use and tanning.
- Significant differences were evident between attitudes in male and female sunbed non-users.
- No specific trends were identified with differences in attitudes between schools.

Conclusions

Overall, the level of sunbed usage reported by young people in the four participating Cheshire schools was low in comparison to other published studies, although the pattern of more female than male users was similar to that reported elsewhere. One school (urban/deprived) did have a considerably higher percentage of sunbed users than the other three, but the response rate from this school was very low and so it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions from this. In general, the findings from the four schools were similar with no particular differences in knowledge or attitudes amongst participating young people identified. Those who used sunbeds were more likely than non-users to smoke and have family members who used sunbeds, a pattern that was also identified in young people who stated that they might consider using sunbeds in the future. Thus, this identifies particular 'at risk' groups who may benefit from targeted health promotion and protection activities. Sunbed users were more likely to consider sunbeds in a positive way than non-users, although many appeared to be aware of the risks of sunbed usage, as did many of the non-users. However, a fair number of respondents indicated that they were 'unsure' about many issues related to tanning and the use of sunbeds and were unaware of guidelines regarding 'safe' use, which also highlight a possible need for awareness raising in these areas.