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Young people and sunbed usage in Cheshire

Blacon High School

Executive Summary

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Summary

Blacon 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 Blacon High School appears first, followed by a summary of the overall findings.

3 Blacon High School results

At Blacon High School, 80 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 Blacon 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 (14% females, 3% males). Smokers were also more likely to use a sunbed. Males were more likely to use sunbeds than females if their family also used sunbeds. Of those respondents whose family did not use sunbeds, females were more likely to use sunbeds than males.

Table 1 Use of sunbeds by pupils

		%	n
Have you ever used a sunbed – all pupils		9	7/80
Sex	Males	3	1/37
	Females	14	6/43
Smoking	Yes	14	1/7
	Occasionally	0	0/3
	No	9	6/69
Family use sunbeds	Males	13	1/8
	Females	8	2/24
Family don't use sunbeds	Males	0	0/29
	Females	21	4/19

Respondents who had not used sunbed beds were asked if they would consider using one in the future. Table 2 presents the characteristics of Blacon 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		26	19/73
Sex	Males	3	1/36
	Females	49	18/37
Smoking	Yes	67	4/6
	Occasionally	33	1/3
	No	21	13/63
Family use sunbeds	Males	0	0/7
	Females	68	15/22
Family don't use sunbeds	Males	3	1/29
	Females	20	3/15

As Table 2 illustrates, 26% of respondents who had not used a sunbed indicated that they would consider using one. Of the 37 females, 18 (49%) indicated that they might use a sunbed whereas of the 36 males, 1 (3%) indicated that he might use a sunbed. When examining smoking amongst potential sunbed users, smokers were more likely to consider using sunbeds. The percentage of potential sunbed users increased with

the levels of smoking, ranging from 21% (13 out of 63) of non-smokers through to 67% (4 out of 6) of smokers who would consider using a sunbed. Females were more likely to consider using sunbeds than males if their family used sunbeds and if their family did not use sunbeds.

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 Blacon High School.

Table 3 Attitudes towards sunbeds and tanning

	Blacon High School sunbed users			Blacon High School non-users		
	SA/A (%)	NS (%)	D/SD (%)	SA/A (%)	NS (%)	D/SD (%)
A tan makes you look healthy	4 (57)	2 (29)	1 (14)	26 (37)	30 (42)	15 (21)
Using a sunbed is a good way to create a 'base tan' before going on holiday	4 (57)	1 (14)	2 (29)	17 (24)	25 (35)	29 (41)
Using a sunbed before going on holiday to a hot country prevents burning when you are there	0 (0)	3 (43)	4 (57)	4 (6)	30 (44)	34 (50)
A tan makes you more attractive	2 (33)	2 (33)	2 (33)	19 (27)	25 (36)	26 (37)
A tan makes you feel more confident	5 (71)	1 (14)	1 (14)	15 (21)	29 (41)	26 (37)
Going on a sunbed makes people feel more relaxed	1 (14)	4 (57)	2 (29)	9 (13)	48 (70)	12 (17)
A tan makes you more popular	0 (0)	0 (0)	7 (100)	2 (3)	19 (28)	48 (70)
Those that are tanned look more attractive than those who have pale skin	2 (27)	1 (14)	4 (57)	13 (19)	25 (36)	32 (46)
Using a sunbed is actually safer than sunbathing outdoors	0 (0)	3 (43)	4 (57)	2 (3)	30 (44)	37 (54)
Sunbeds are harmful	5 (71)	1 (14)	1 (14)	56 (81)	10 (14)	3 (4)
Sunbeds cause skin cancer	5 (71)	1 (14)	1 (14)	54 (77)	15 (21)	1 (1)
Sunbeds make skin wrinkly	4 (57)	2 (29)	1 (14)	32 (46)	37 (53)	1 (1)
Sunbeds give you dry skin	3 (43)	3 (43)	1 (14)	33 (48)	34 (49)	2 (3)

Table 3 Attitudes towards sunbeds and tanning continued...

	Blacon High School sunbed users			Blacon High School non-users		
	SA/A (%)	NS (%)	D/SD (%)	SA/A (%)	NS (%)	D/SD (%)
Sunbeds should not be used by people that have red hair	0 (0)	4 (57)	3 (43)	5 (7)	35 (50)	30 (43)
Sunbeds should not be used by those who have freckles	1 (14)	3 (43)	3 (43)	2 (3)	41 (59)	27 (39)
Sunbeds should not be used by those who have sensitive skin	3 (43)	3 (43)	1 (14)	25 (36)	41 (59)	4 (6)
Sunbeds should not be used by those who are under 16	2 (33)	1 (17)	3 (50)	38 (54)	23 (33)	9 (13)
Using a sunbed more than once a week is too much	3 (43)	1 (14)	3 (43)	29 (41)	32 (46)	9 (13)
Using a sunbed more than once a month is too much	0 (0)	1 (17)	5 (83)	4 (6)	41 (59)	25 (36)
Using a sunbed at all is too much	1 (14)	0 (0)	6 (86)	8 (11)	30 (43)	32 (46)
To use a sunbed at all is dangerous	3 (43)	2 (29)	2 (29)	22 (32)	34 (49)	13 (19)
Sunbeds are completely harmless	1 (14)	2 (29)	4 (57)	3 (4)	17 (24)	50 (71)
There should be a law banning the use of sunbeds by those younger than sixteen	2 (29)	1 (14)	4 (57)	36 (52)	22 (32)	11 (16)
People should be free to use a sunbed as many times as they want	2 (29)	1 (14)	4 (57)	8 (11)	28 (40)	34 (49)
I find that sunbeds are too expensive to use	0 (0)	0 (0)	7 (100)	3 (4)	43 (61)	24 (34)
Using a sunbed is a good treatment for spots on the face and body	2 (29)	3 (43)	2 (29)	3 (4)	45 (64)	22 (31)

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.
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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.
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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.