



QUEENSLAND SUN SURVEY SUMMER 1991/1992



Information Circular No. 12



**EPIDEMIOLOGY AND HEALTH INFORMATION BRANCH
HEALTH ADVANCEMENT BRANCH**

QUEENSLAND SUN SURVEY - SUMMER 1991-1992

A Telephone Survey of Queenslanders aged 14 years and over was conducted in the Summer of 1991/1992. Comprehensive analysis of the survey data is continuing. This publication previews the overall results.

Notes concerning the survey methodology are contained in Attachment 1.

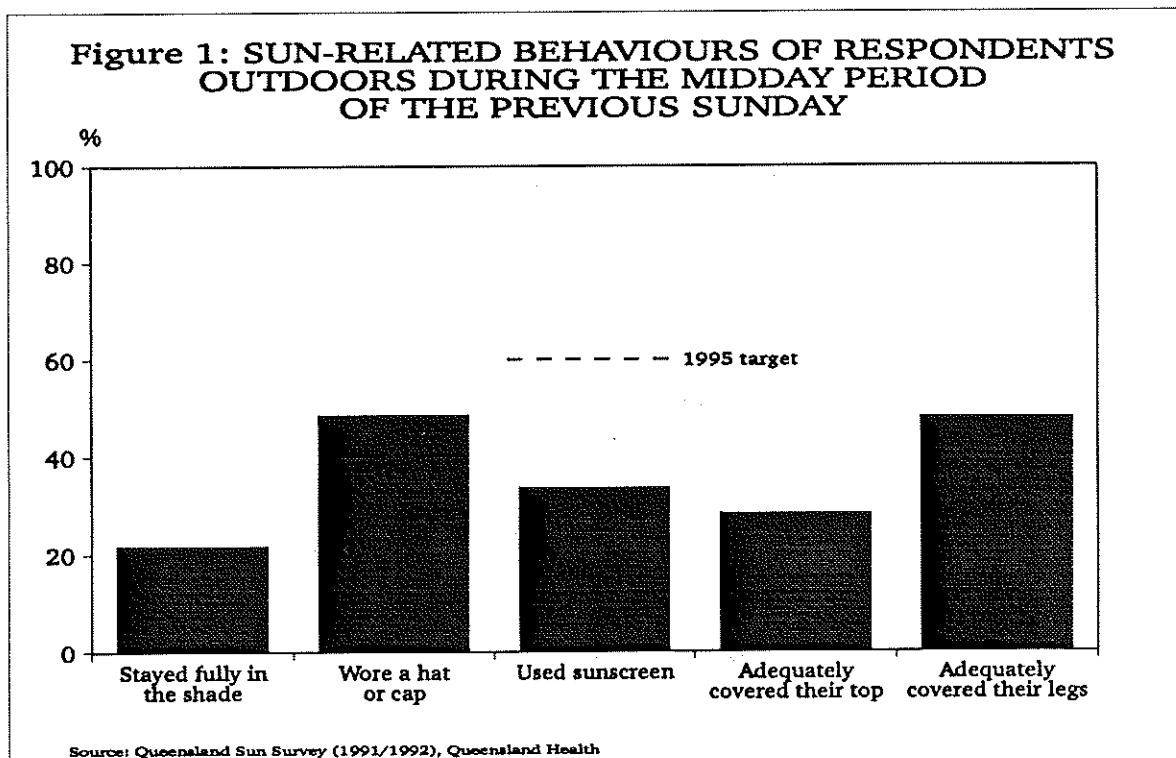
Sun Related Behaviour on the Previous Weekend

Respondents were asked about their sun related behaviour during the midday periods of the previous weekend. Overall, **51%** of respondents were outdoors for more than 15 minutes between 11 am and 3 pm on the previous Sunday. The percentage for the previous Saturday was slightly lower, at **43%**.

Twenty percent (**20%**) of all respondents reported getting sunburnt on the previous weekend. For comparison, proposed national health goals and targets call for a halving of this figure by 1995.

As highlighted in Figure 1 below, overall levels of sun protection used were very low. In particular, on those occasions when a respondent was outdoors on the previous weekend only:

- * **22%** stayed fully in the shade; and
- * **35%** wore sunscreen. In comparison, a proposed national health target is to have 60% of those outdoors using factor 15 sunscreen by 1995



Usual Sun-related Behaviour

In addition to questions concerning their behaviour on the previous weekend, respondents were also asked about their usual behaviour. Results indicate that levels of sun-safe behaviour appear to drop further during the non-Summer months. Outside Summer, the percentage of respondents who reported that they "*often don't bother to put on a hat*" rose from 40% to 58%, while the percentage who "*usually put some sunscreen on*" fell from 76% to 40%. Forty eight percent (48%) reported that they did attempt to protect themselves even when in the sun for periods of less than 15 minutes.

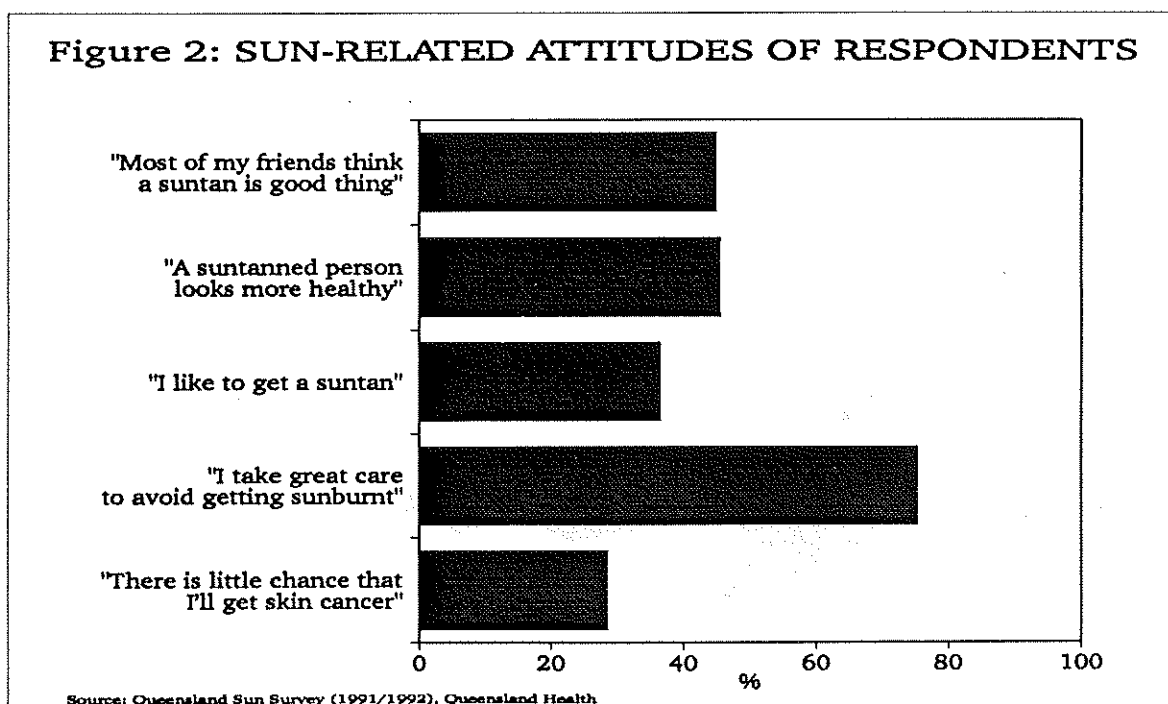
Sun-related Attitudes

Nearly a third of all respondents (29%) did not consider themselves to be susceptible to skin cancer. One in five (22%) said they did not take great care to avoid getting sunburnt.

Figure 2 below illustrates the very strong pro-suntan attitudes in Queensland. The survey revealed that:

- * 37% of respondents "*liked to get a suntan*";
- * 46% thought "*a suntanned person looks more healthy*". A smaller percentage (30%) internalised this and agreed that "*I feel more healthy with a suntan*"; and
- * 45% agreed that their friends thought "*a suntan is a good thing*".

However, most respondents (80% of males and 96% of females) strongly agreed that "*a lot of sun throughout life ages the skin*".



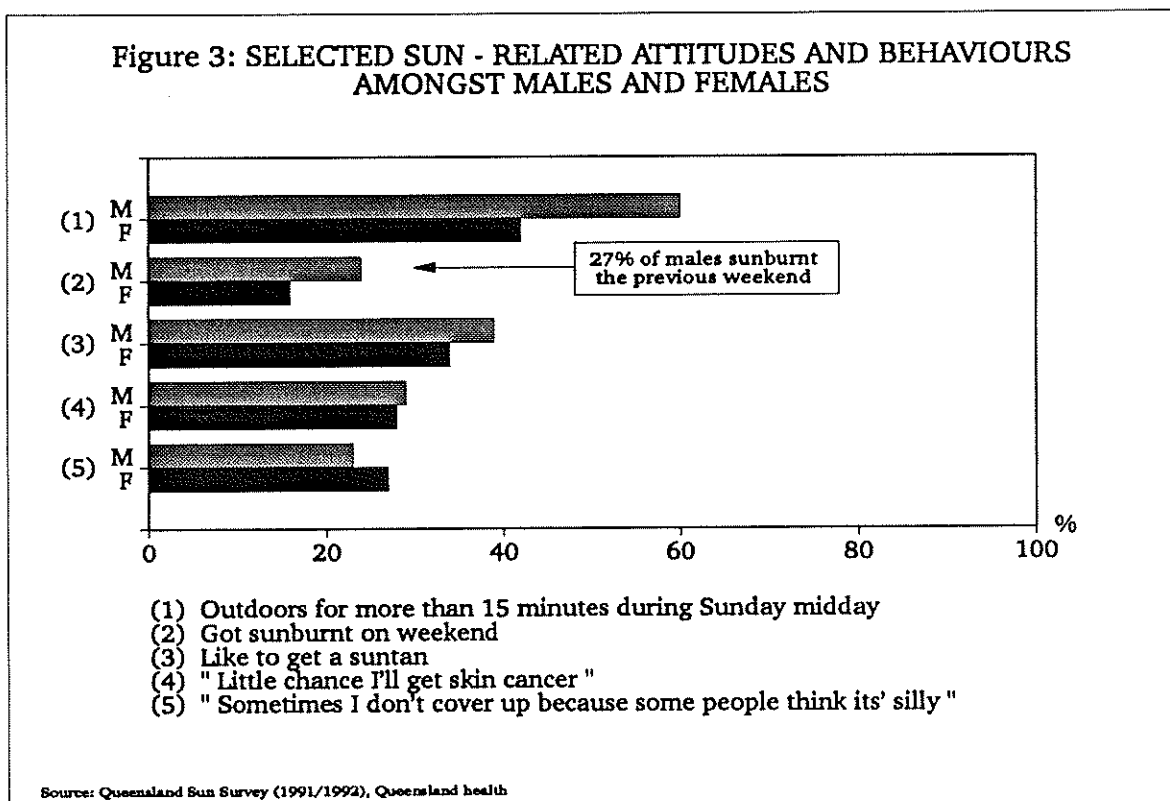
Perceived Barriers

One quarter (25%) of all respondents agreed that they found it difficult to protect themselves from the sun. While the questionnaire contained only limited questioning about sun protective clothing:

- * 75% of all respondents agreed that "clothes that fully cover me from the sun are hot and uncomfortable to wear"
- * 25% reported that they sometimes do not wear clothing that fully covers them because "some people think it looks silly"

Variation in Sun-related Attitudes and Behaviours

Figure 3 highlights variations between males and females for selected attitudes and behaviours.

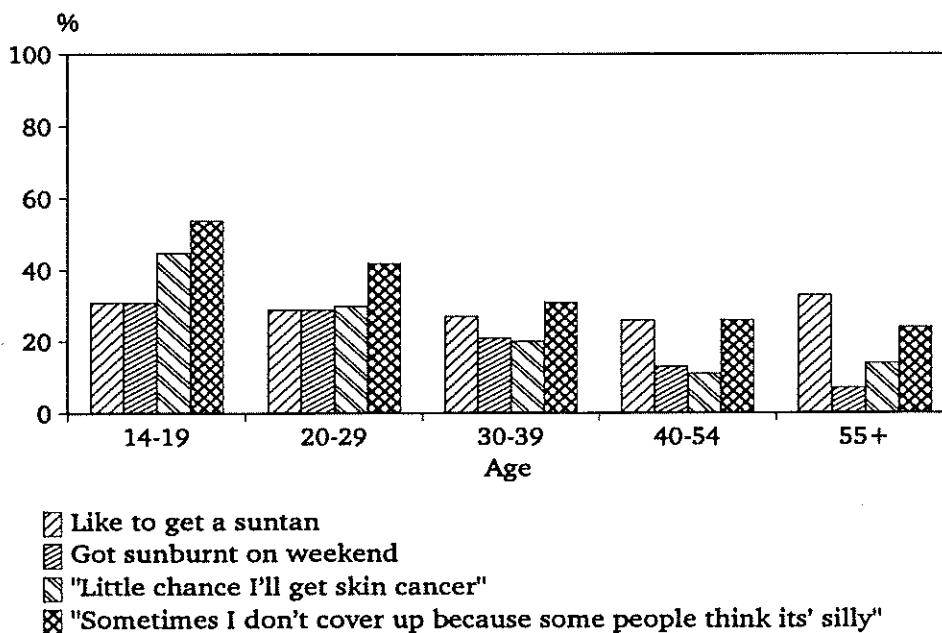


While males were slightly more likely than females to find suntans more desirable, and less likely to see themselves as susceptible to skin cancer, greater differences were observed in behaviour. Males were more likely to be outdoors in the middle of the day on the previous weekend.

Most survey items showed some gradient with age. Figure 4 below depicts the most noticeable patterns, which were that:

- * teenagers were very much more likely to like to get a suntan (52% compared to 30% for those aged 55 years and over);
- * almost a half of all teenagers (45%) "sometimes did not cover up because some people think it is silly" compared to only 12% in those aged 55 years and over;
- * a high proportion of teenagers (31%) reported getting sunburnt the previous weekend. This proportion remained relatively high into the 30-39 year age group.

Figure 4: SELECTED SUN - RELATED ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS: BY AGE GROUPS



Source: Queensland Sun Survey (1991/1992), Queensland Health

Many other attitudes and behaviours also varied with factors such as place of usual residence, perceived skin type and, to a lesser extent, education.

Awareness of Skin Cancer Message

The survey indicated that awareness of skin cancer and sun protection messages was very high. Nearly every respondent (97%) reported that *"in the last six months, they had read, seen or heard some advertising or information about skin cancer prevention and protecting yourself from the sun"* This could, however, have included commercial advertising, for example for sunscreens or sunglasses. When questioned further, large percentages of respondents recalled a *"health announcement message"*. Table 1 below summarises the source of awareness of these messages.

Table 1: Awareness of Recent Advertising about Skin Cancer Prevention and Protecting Yourself from the Sun

| <i>Source of Awareness</i> | <i>"Any Advertising or Information"</i> | <i>"Health Announcement Message"</i> |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Media | % Response | % Response |
| Television | 91% | 80% |
| Newspaper | 34% | n.a. |
| Magazine Articles | 24% | n.a. |
| Radio% Response | 23% | 19% |

Summary

On any day of a summer weekend, about one half of the adult population spends considerable time outdoors in the midday sun. Broad comparisons with an earlier survey conducted in Summer 1988/89 indicate that while Queenslanders do not appear to be any more likely now than they were in 1988/89 to stay indoors to avoid the midday sun, those outdoors appear to be more likely to protect themselves from the sun.

However, the overall level of sun protection used by those outdoors remains relatively low. During Summer 1991/1992, 1 in 5 Queenslanders (and relatively more males than females) reported being sunburnt on the previous weekend. Extrapolating this to the 13 weeks in Summer and many of the non-Summer months (as is appropriate in a region with a climate such as Queensland's), it is clear that a large percentage of the population is accumulating dangerous exposures to ultra-violet radiation.

Many Queenslanders do not consider themselves to be at risk of developing skin cancer, and many do not take special precautions to avoid being sunburnt. Suntans are highly desirable to many adult Queenslanders, particularly males and those in younger age groups. There is little indication that attitudes to developing skin cancer have improved since 1988/89, although there do appear to have been some positive changes in attitudes to suntans.

These attitudes and behaviours must be viewed in the light of continuing high morbidity and mortality from skin cancers. Queensland has the highest incidence rates for melanoma in the world, with rates 50% higher than in the next highest Australian state (NSW). The incidence of melanoma is estimated to have quadrupled in the last 20 years, making it now the most commonly occurring cancer. Melanoma causes approximately 140 deaths per year in Queensland.

Since 1988/89, there has been no improvement in the percentage of the population who find it difficult to protect themselves from the sun. While the survey included only limited questioning about specific barriers to sun protection behaviours, the comfort and appearance of clothing seem to be important barriers, particularly amongst teenagers.

Community awareness of skin cancer and sun protection messages is almost universal, television messages being by far the most commonly cited source. Clearly this awareness needs to be maintained and translated into behavioural change.

Sun protection programs need to focus more on strategies designed to enable people to adopt sun-safe behaviours by making them more desirable and easier choices. Such strategies might include:

- * the provision of more shade and other environmental changes;
- * encouraging sun-safe behaviour in individuals and in their social networks; and
- * addressing pro-suntan beliefs and images.

In addition, strategies targeted to the needs of particular groups such as young teenage males need to be further developed. Strategies focussing on workplaces, schools, local community, sports and leisure environments will require sustained intersectoral collaboration.

This survey will provide much information to assist in the development and evaluation of such strategies. For additional information, regarding this circular contact **David Rowlands** in Epidemiology and Health Information Branch, on (07) 234 1130. For information regarding Queensland Health sun protection strategies contact **Cheryl Bray** in the Health Advancement Branch, on (07) 234 1424.

Attachment 1 - Survey Methodology

The telephone survey of 2,317 randomly selected Queenslanders aged 14 years and over was conducted on the Monday nights of Summer 1991/1992.

The survey was commissioned by the Epidemiology and Health Information Branch of Queensland Health, with the support of and assistance from the Health Advancement Branch, and was managed by the Cancer Prevention Research Centre of the University of Queensland.

A number of areas outside Brisbane were over-sampled, and final sample sizes are detailed in Table 1 below. During analysis, data were weighted to the regional age-sex distribution of the Queensland population. The survey included adequate samples of younger adults. Final sample sizes in each age group are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 1: Regional Sample Sizes

| <i>Location</i> | <i>Sample Size</i> |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Brisbane | 838 |
| Maroochy | 142 |
| Gladstone | 140 |
| Burdekin/Bowen | 141 |
| Cairns | 140 |
| Rest of Queensland | 916 |
| Total | 2,317 |

Table 2: Age Profile of Sample

| <i>Age Group</i> | <i>Sample Size</i> |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 14-19 years | 428 |
| 20-29 years | 628 |
| 30-39 years | 615 |
| 40-54 years | 393 |
| 55+ years | 253 |
| Total | 2,317 |

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