Qualitative Exploration of Underage Use of Sunbeds

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Research commissioned by Cancer Research UK and undertaken by CMInsight
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1. Introduction
In the 2007 Cancer Reform Strategy, a commitment was made to ‘gather more information about the number and distribution of sunbeds, and the scale of sunbed use by minors’

In early 2008, the Dept of Health commissioned CR-UK to undertake a scoping survey to explore the prevalence of sunbed use by under 18s, which included
- National research to establish level and location of sunbed use by under 18s
- Regional research among children in six cities to explore sunbed use

Qualitative research was then required as an extension of the study, to strengthen and confirm data.
Research Objectives

- To further explore, qualitatively, under 18s’ reasons for using sunbeds, patterns of usage, and to gain an understanding of the sunbed outlets they choose to use, and what factors motivate their choice

- To unpack the whole sunbed experience, from beginning to end

- Specifically, to investigate the level of supervision in sunbed outlets used by under 18s

- To assess knowledge of the health risks associated with sunbeds, and awareness of coverage/campaigns in this area
Sample and Method (1)

12 mini groups:

- Each with around 5-6 respondents (total 69); some friendship pairs
- All female, aged 15-17
  - 6 x 15 yr olds, 24 x 16 yr olds, 37 x 17 yr olds, 2 misrecruited x 18 yr olds
- 90 minutes long
- 2 in each of six cities:
  - Stoke on Trent
  - Brighton
  - Bushey (North London)
  - Newcastle
  - Solihull
  - Liverpool
Sample and Method (2)

All to have used a sunbed (in a commercial outlet) in past 9 months

- 4+ per group to have used a sunbed 10+ times in past 9 months, or to use one at least once a month
- Minimum of 2-3 per group to have used more than one outlet
- All to plan to use sunbeds in the future
- Groups conducted by Clare Mansfield and Catherine Millican
  January 7th-15th 2009
Discussion covered…

- Warm up exercise (draw sunbed outlet known best)
- Key reasons for using sunbeds
- Patterns of usage; visited alone or with companions
- First usage
- Sunbed outlets; pros and cons; differences, and reasons for choosing
- The sunbed experience in detail: practicalities and feelings
- Supervision and rules
- Health and Safety information
- Health risk awareness
- Who do they trust to provide credible information about safety?
- SunSmart/media awareness
- (Also covered: sunbathing; fake tans; skin types)
2. Main Findings
Overview

- There is plenty of encouragement, even pressure, from multiple sources, for girls in this age group to use sunbeds
- It is easy, quick, and often cheap to use them
- Although gaining a tan is a key reason for under 18s using sunbeds, it is not the only motivator
- …the ‘means’ itself can be a prompt as well as the ‘end’
- Moreover, sunbeds are not necessarily ‘effective’ tan producers, which can encourage more reckless use
- All know the health risks, but rationalise their behaviour – often comforted by being not the heaviest of users
- Supervision is often minimal; rules are typically lax
- …and the girls themselves are complicit in this, going under age, not reading safety information, etc
- Yet there is evidence they would like stricter rules – and would feel more cared for as an individual with these
- Promoting ‘safer’ use would be an easier (more realistic) objective than ‘no use’
Observations on the sample

Different kinds of girls present in the sample:

- Working, eg in hairdressers, bank
- Training eg beauty therapists (several), hairdressers
- B techs/diplomas eg Sports; Performing Arts; Health & Social Care; Media
- GCSEs
- A levels (often intelligent/articulate)
- Some overweight; some slim
- Some highly groomed/glamorous
- A few with poor skin (acne/eczema)
- Large proportion from single parent or step-parent homes
- One 16 year old mother
- Some (admitted being) smokers (up to a quarter)
- Many orientated towards ‘going out’ rather than ‘staying in’

A range of types of girls use sunbeds
Regional observations

**Bushey**
- More educated sample
- ...also mainly very well turned out
- More discriminating re outlets
- Outlets overall better supervised/offer more ‘service’
- Most started using sunbeds aged 16

**Brighton**
- Vast number of outlets available, apparently
- More expensive (than Mids/North)
- Girls typically not highly educated, and quite cavalier
- Most started using sunbeds aged 14/15

**Liverpool**
- More started using sunbeds young (14)
- Going on for longer (9-12 mins)
- A couple have been on >once a day

**Solihull**
- Range of respondents
- ...and range of outlets, with varying levels of supervision

**Stoke on Trent**
- Educated, groomed girls
- Familiarity with a responsible outlet – Koffee Brown
- But many examples of less supervision

**Newcastle**
- Cheaper outlets; some very minimal
- Block bookings typical
- Highly regular ‘going out’/drinking etc
Key reasons for using sunbeds

Can be ‘end’ focused or ‘means’ focused; or a mix

End Focused
- Specific occasions where want to look good
- Counteract feelings of ‘ugliness’
- Pressure to have a tan from others (friends, or in media)
- Skin conditions

Means Focused
- Being grown up
- Antidote to boredom; something to do
- Habit/addictive aspect
- Recapturing holiday feeling

At some level connected with wanting a tan

There’s a ‘pay off’ to the visit itself
‘End focused’ reasons for using sunbeds

Positive desire for tan
(as before…)

- Look better, ‘healthier’; a ‘glow’
- Feel sexier
- Look skinnier
- Clothes look better; tan sets colours off; can show more of body
- Need less/no make up – or it looks better
- Evenness of colour
- Overall feel happier/more confident
- Media and peer group pressure too (Nicola = ‘the ugly one’ in Girls Aloud)

- …once have a tan, some don’t want to lose it; fear ‘changing back’

Desire for a tan to counterbalance a negative…

- Prompted by dissatisfaction with looks…
  - ‘bare’, ‘unfinished’
- …a sense that a tan gives someone more ‘definition’, both physically and psychologically?

- Skin conditions eg eczema, acne, psoriasis; doctors may suggest sunbeds

A tan offers both inherent and ‘solution’-based benefits
‘End focused’ reasons for using sunbeds (2)

Occasions prompting specific desire for a tan

**Holiday related**
- **Pre-holiday**
  - Not to be white when arrive
  - ‘Base’ protection (esp for paler skinned)
  - Tan faster, if prepared

- **Post-holiday**
  - To maintain the look
  - …and ‘feeling’
  - Or because didn’t get a tan on holiday

**Proms/parties/weddings, etc**
- **‘Instead of’ holiday**
  - No holiday – no tan…
  - …so get a sunbed one

- **When looks are key**
  - Showing body
  - Being looked at
  - Importance of being seen to make an effort…
  - …but also pleasure in indulging in the ‘lead up’

Getting a tan may be an enjoyable part of preparing for an event
‘End focused’ reasons for using sunbeds (3)

Boys?

To attract boys?

- Strong belief boys prefer girls with a tan – and dislike ‘pasty’/white girls
- But some claim desire for tan unrelated to attracting boys

Boys’ use of sunbeds?

- Nearly all know boys who use sunbeds (increasing?)
- Many (biased to less educated?) feel boys look better/sexier with a tan; especially dark haired boys
- Though some feel boys’ vanity in this respect offputting
- ‘Natural’ tan best, but sunbed tan much more natural/acceptable than fake tan, for boys
- Mention in Brighton of boys ‘dicking around’ on sunbeds
- A few appeared to want to keep boys out! – a girls’ thing

Boys felt to prefer tanned girls – and some evidence of vice versa
End focused reasons for using sunbeds

**Boys**
- I've heard boys say that pasty girls are disgusting
  (Brighton)
- I don’t like the idea they [boys] would be so vain, but it does make them look good – I couldn’t deal with pale and pasty!
  (Newcastle)
- I think boys look sexier with a tan!
  (Bushey)
- Boys prefer ‘Latin’ girls...and they prefer girls without make up.
  (Bushey)

**Holidays**
- If you get into your bikini you can feel pasty white compared with all the other holidaymakers...so it [sunbed tan] can make you feel a bit better
  (Bushey)
- You get a better tan if you go on a sunbed first, don’t you
  (Stoke on Trent)
- Now going on the sunbeds, I never burn on holiday like I used to when I was younger
  (Solihull)
- You feel better, you feel healthier....when I occasionally get spots, it clears them up
  (Newcastle)
- You feel better, you feel much happier...it affects your mood, you feel better about yourself
  (Bushey)

**Skin**
- My friend’s doctor said it was better for spots than pills or medicine – and it did work for her
  (Brighton)
- They say, about Nicola in Girls Aloud, why doesn’t she wear fake tan?
  (Bushey)
- I just think everyone looks nicer with a tan...you really glow, you don’t have to wear make up...
  (Brighton)
- If I didn’t have a tan, I would feel awful
  (Liverpool)
‘Means focused’ reasons for using sunbeds (1)

Emotional

- Feeling grown up for going (eg with older sister)
- Recapturing a bit of holiday feeling
- Occasionally know/like the people working there; go to chat

‘Mechanical’

- ‘Something to do’; ‘something for yourself’
- Easy, quick and cheap (vs other pamperings/self-improvements)
- Becomes habitual...just ‘pop in’ whenever can.... and eventually may become ‘addicted’ (to process as much as end result); language of the addict... (I did ‘quit’... I’m ‘back on’ them...etc)

Using sunbeds can have emotional/habitual attractions
Means focused reasons for using sunbeds

‘Addictive’ aspect

I just loved the fact I was keeping up a tan...and looking browner than everybody, but I liked going there too – because I’d go on the sunbed for ten minutes then I’d sit and chat for 40 minutes with the person there. I was down there all the time… (Newcastle)

I did stop using them, but somehow...I started up again (Newcastle)

You just can’t stop going on them...because when you lose your tan you think you look crap, so you have to go on them – to make yourself feel better (Brighton)

Some people get addicted to it, they can’t help it. My mum was. (Brighton)

Something to do

You go shopping, go for a sunbed then something to eat (Stoke on Trent)

We just go ‘shall we do the sunbeds’ and we go on for a chat (Liverpool)

It’s something to do...I go on and off (Newcastle)

Habitual

It’s because I’m like, used to going there... (Brighton)

After a workout, I’d have a shower then I’d go on the sunbeds (Stoke on Trent)

Every Friday night, before we go out – you feel more ready to go out, more good about yourself, to have that boost (Brighton)

I go on the way back from college or the gym (Solihull)
Fake tan

Spectrum of usage
- Majority using it to some extent
- Some switching between fake tan and sunbeds
- A handful now veering towards fake tan altogether...

Has some advantages over sunbeds (to some): can be ‘last minute’ and very cheap – a ‘quick fix’ on bits that show; also safer

But vs sunbeds:
- ‘not as natural’
- danger of ‘orange’ (even if some brands (eg St Tropez) better)
- very limited lifetime (4-5 days?)
- can go streaky eg post washing, or rain
- comes off on sheets
- possible skin reactions

For most, fake tan not a viable overall alternative to sunbeds
Fake tan

Self applied
- For best/good results, requires patience, effort and skill (lots feel they don’t have)
- Less natural look achieved?
- But cheaper/quicker than spray tan

Spray Tan
- Can be more even/natural; last longer (vs self applied)
- And more ‘pampery’; more of a treat
- But pricey (£20-25), and takes time

NB some awareness, eg in Newcastle, of ‘the injection’; most respondents (currently) wary of this
Sunbathing

- Majority are keen to catch the sun – when they can
- …though some admit sunbathing has ‘boring’ side
- But holidays generally sun-orientated; coming home with tan important/vital
- Most start on medium protection (SPF15-20), but quickly reduce down…very low factors or tanning oil used by the end
- Several reports of burning quite badly

Vs sunbeds?

- Sunbeds generally thought more of a health risk
  - Sun far away/ use protection in sun/ sun ‘good for you’ in some way
  - Sunbeds more intense/‘concentrated’/‘closer’; more artificial?
- A few think sunbeds safer
  - More controlled; shorter times

Sunbed users are generally sun worshippers
Sunbeds: patterns of usage

Pre-event

Pre-holiday

Sporadic

Phases

Regular throughout year (1-3 x a week)

Seasonal regular (eg April-Oct)

Pre-event means and end

Pre-holiday end more than means

Sporadic end more than means

Phases means more than end

Regular throughout year means and end

Seasonal regular end more than means
Sunbeds: patterns of usage

Pre-holiday/event
- Pre-holiday typically 1-3x per week in month or so leading up to holiday
- Pre-event: similar to above for big event (eg Prom), or 2-3 x in week before a party; part of build up

Sporadic
- Ad hoc, unplanned, spontaneous – and mood driven
- When bored; when feeling down/in bad mood/’pale’; when a friend suggests it
- Minor pampering; ‘something (easy) to do for yourself’
- Doesn’t result in a tan!
Phases
- ‘On/off’ modes; on mode may be kicked off by a holiday or event…continues for a while, then peters out
- …until next trigger
- Poor skin condition may prompt some into phase

Regular
- 1-3 x a week, often linked with specific routine; might be ‘on way back from school (certain days), or ‘every Friday before I go out’
- …at higher end can be linked with ‘addiction’ side
- Both important to have the tan – and a comforting part of life to go
- Seasonal regular = regular, but only for part of year
- Note: almost no-one a ‘once a month’ or less regular (→ no result)

Seasonal regular
- Most typically summer months, when wearing more revealing clothes
- But some evidence of regular winter usage too
Patterns of usage

**Regular**
- Twice a week with my sister – I’m a bit of an addict. I have a block booking… (Newcastle)
- You love the feeling, you love being brown… (Brighton)
- I couldn’t see myself going pale again (Stoke on Trent)

**Pre-event**
- Work do’s - when I know I’m going to be around people who look good, and I want to make an effort for myself, and make me feel better (Bushey)
- It’s really good before dance shows (Solihull)
- It’s a bit addictive, once you see your tan starting to fade, you need to go back and top it up (Solihull)

**Pre-holiday**
- That fear of walking into the swimming pool … there’s the new people, so white (Solihull)

**Phases**
- I went through a phase where I would just not come off them – and I’d keep getting a block booking and going on them… I just loved it (Newcastle)

**Sporadic**
- I might think – my hands are a bit pale… I don’t like looking sort of ghosty (Brighton)
- Now and then… with mum or friends (Newcastle)
- When I feel I don’t look very good (Stoke on Trent)
- I only go on when my mates are like ‘we’re going to get a tan, do you want to come with us?’ (Solihull)
First Usage

Person-prompted
- Mum (‘come with me’/ ‘can I go with you’)
- Older sister/friend’s older sister/female relative (suggested, or was asked)
- Someone (known) in the tanning business suggested
- Friend(s) – encouraging less paleness, or just ‘to try it out’

Event-prompted
- Pre-holiday (maybe via mum/sister/friend/cousin, etc)
- Nan – post a holiday without much sun
- Prom (v common)
- Wedding/other big event
- Everyone else at dance competition was tanned...

Outlet prompted (rarer)
- Saw because use nail bar
- Active marketing in gyms (being asked by staff; seeing leaflets)

Majority started aged 15 (or less); rest aged 16
First usage of sunbeds

**Person- prompted** & **Event- prompted**

- **A friend had a really good tan, which made me feel jealous…when I asked her about it, she said – come along…** (Bushey)
- **We [brother’s girlfriend] just went on one time after the gym. She was going on so I thought OK, but I only went on for 3 minutes and hated it** (Solihull)
- **I [aged 14] was with a friend who lived in my street and she was older than me … I ended up going on it** (Liverpool)
- **I went with my mum and sister, before my uncle’s wedding…I didn’t really notice the difference though** (Brighton)
- **I went before I went on holiday because I didn’t want to burn…I only went on for 3 minutes and hated it** (Solihull)
- **I suppose with my mates going on, that made me want to go on** (Stoke on Trent)
- **My sister does it, that’s how I got into it** (Stoke on Trent)
- **Mum suggested it for before my holiday – for protection when I got there. She used to use them** (Newcastle)
- **My dress was backless and I’m like really really pale naturally and I didn’t want want to look really stupid at the prom, really pale** (Stoke on Trent)
- **Leading up to Christmas, I started going on them** (Liverpool)
- **I suppose with my mates going on, that made me want to go on** (Stoke on Trent)
- **Mum suggested it for before my holiday – for protection when I got there. She used to use them** (Newcastle)
Some ongoing triggers to regular usage

Fear of ‘slipping back’ to non-tanned
- Feeling ‘tanned’; keeping ‘the new me’ – and increasingly feeling that pale = repulsive
- Competitiveness with other users; keeping up

Prop to self esteem
- Doing something for myself; a little treat/boost; becomes relied on

Daily life factors
- Fits into a routine
- Knowing the people at the outlet, or occasionally meeting friends there (eg Koffee Brown in Stoke)
Home sunbeds

➢ A dying breed?

➢ Mentioned in five groups:
  ➢ Nearly always in the past; ‘used to have….’
  ➢ …in relation to older generation (mum, friend’s mum, aunt, etc)
  ➢ Often defunct now; broken/ ‘in garage’ etc
  ➢ A few had been on a home one, but none regularly
  ➢ Some talk of rented sunbeds; one (Newcastle) mum rents one each summer; one friend (Solihull) rented one before prom
Sunbed outlets

- There are invariably a number to choose from

- Can be
  - in town/city centres
  - in suburban streets
  - In villages
  - on the beach front
  - one an hour from Brighton ‘in the middle of nowhere’

- Most have one favourite – but many have tried 2, some more

- A few did feel personal loyalty to one outlet, eg
  - Knew staff there
  - Had named ‘box’ with record card, creams; also somewhere to put jewellery
Sunbed outlets

Main reasons:

1. **Convenience**
   - Close
   - On the way to/from...

2. **Recommendation**
   - The one introduced to
   - Friend/sister/mum goes there
   - Mum goes for her nails
   - etc

3. Specific outlet attributes, eg
   - ‘Nicer’ place (eg clean; robe; ‘fewer randomers’, etc)
   - (occasionally) better/hotter
   - (one example) because unmanned

4. Outlet known for something else (NB rare)
   - Leisure centre/gym
   - Nails

5. Someone known working there
   - Friendly

Levels of discrimination vary, but price is **not** a big factor in choice.
Types of sunbed outlet

Dedicated to tanning

- **Tanning salons**
  - Usually have options
  - ...stand up, lie down
  - ...maybe spray tan too
  - More professional/expert?
  - Beds ‘stronger’?
  - Better supervised? (see later)

- **Nail-bar-come-tanning-salon**
  - Tanning often part of key raison d’être
  - May offer other services eg tattoos; jewellery

- **Unmanned tanning booths**
  - Newcastle only
  - Slot in money for a tan

Less dedicated to tanning

- **Hairdressers**
  - Tends to have just one bed
  - Cheaper?
  - Some feel self conscious walking through

- **Leisure centres/gyms/hotels**
  - May only have 1-2 beds
  - Changing rooms
  - Staff not experts
  - Can ‘tack on’ a sunbed session – to other experience

- **Sunbeds loosely attached to other services/entertainment, eg**
  - Arcade
  - Chippy

Centrality of ‘tanning’ varies considerably in the outlets
Sunbed outlets

Factors in choosing

- I just go to the one I always went to (Brighton)
- If you have block bookings you get to know them (Newcastle)
- The one I go to is just at the end of my road – it’s really convenient (Bushey)
- I chose there because I had my nails done there before and my mum goes there for massages (Stoke on Trent)
- Normally I go there, but I’ve been to one where I live a couple of times because I can’t be bothered to walk up the hill (Stoke on Trent!)
- There are drinks and sofas so you can feel relaxed and just sit and have a chat there (Stoke on Trent)

Different types

- You get a bit more ‘service’ at the tanning place (Brighton)
- There’s one that’s just a house – with a chippy downstairs! They’re always getting done for drugs… (Newcastle)
- It’s a hairdressers in the front, with tanning in the back (Stoke on Trent)
- It’s opposite my house (Solihull)
- They do nails and massages, as well as tanning (Solihull)
- Ballantynes Fitness Centre where I go to the gym … I went into reception and she said we offer a sunbed facility and targeted me straightaway (Solihull)
The sunbed experience: Stand up or Lie down

- Most have definite preference for one or other
- ...though (Lie down users especially) may have experienced both

**Stand up**

- Slightly more popular in this sample (and thought to be generally); more contemporary?
- Some say better/more intense form of tanning; also ‘all over’ tan
- Involves standing, hands held up (bar/ropes)
- ...listening to music; some dance
- Some anxiety around closed door, and hot metal door handle (see later)

**Lie down**

- The original sunbed
- Some do prefer:
  - Mirrors actual sunbathing
  - More relaxing; pleasurable
  - Sense of ‘me time’
- But many ‘Stand up’ preferrers completely reject
  - *Final Destination* et al
  - General claustrophobia
  - White lines down side of body
- More hygiene issues

A trend towards stand up beds?
The sunbed experience: practicalities

Preparation

- 3 mentions of putting on sunscreen (2 in past)
- Some used salon ‘cream’:
  - Part of ritual
  - Occasionally given (‘dispenser on the wall’, or sachet), more often sold – in sachets or bottles; some girls given it by mum
  - Not all knew what it was! – makes you browner? moisturiser? (though nearly all knew it wasn’t ‘protection’)
  - Some did refer to it as ‘intensifier’ or ‘tan developer’; some sceptical
  - Bushey salon offered wide range – from £1.50 - £5; more expensive = ‘stronger’?
  - Some referred to nice smells (eg strawberry), but to others – “it stinks!”
- Some not offered it; or didn’t want to buy
- One group mentioned having heard of fragrant ‘mists’

Cream often applied without much thought
The sunbed experience: practicalities

During the session
- Music (often radio) played
  - Important – to counteract boredom
  - Sometimes upbeat/dance…or relaxing; may be timed to coincide with minutes
  - Some reports of poor quality/fuzzy or ‘too many ads’
- Fans for cooling typical – though work less well when beds are ‘hot’

Stand up
- Actual booth usually very small; claustrophobic for some
- Can end up ‘groping in the dark’ for door handle at end
- …several reports of this as ‘hot’/burning

Lie down
- Sometimes required to wipe down after use; in practice more often wipe before! Many never pull down lid fully

Some practical discomforts involved
The sunbed experience: practicalities

Goggles

- Used by many – but not all
  - Generally the more educated and/or those going to specialist salons
  - Others ‘close their eyes’ – to avoid marks, or because can’t be bothered, or not provided
  - Some who do use find uncomfortable, or ‘fall off’
- Different arrangements and types (see also later)
  - Some at desk; some in/by booth
  - Some in individual bags; some in ‘unused’ or ‘used’ bowls; some just hanging/shared
  - Some attach to ears; some are stick-ons (‘Winkies’)
  - Some disposable; some recyclable (not Winkies)
  - Some give complete black out; some allow a bit of vision

Different arrangements for goggles, and different attitudes to them
Feelings before…
- Most were nervous/scared, if also excited, the first time…
- ..but soon becomes routine

.... during
- Some anxieties do prevail:
  - Hygiene related: sweat of previous user (eg on lie down, or fabric hand holds)
  - Being ‘trapped’ – in the lie down, or the stand up (some leave the door open)
  - Tube might explode; might fall through the bed
  - Someone might come in (keep knickers on!); might be being filmed?
  - What will happen to hair extensions?
  - Heat of door metal handles at end
- Some element of dreaming/relaxing on lie downs; in stand ups, more endurance or boredom - though a few dance/enjoy

....and after
- Can be satisfying (if in ‘preparing’ mode); some sense a ‘glow’; some keen to shower (smell/stickiness)
The sunbed experience

**Practicalities**

- The cream’s OK when you put it on, smells of strawberry, but it’s sticky and smelly afterwards (Bushey)
- We use the cream if you’ve got a short time to go on them [before event] (Liverpool)
- The music’s a bit fuzzy – and cuts out sometimes (Newcastle)
- I don’t think I’ve ever seen them [goggles] in my sunbed shop (Liverpool)

**Emotional**

- Nice if you’ve had a long day and that… and it’s warm! (Newcastle)
- On a sunbed, it’s warm, you kind of relax (Liverpool)
- I always get dead scared in case my hair extensions frazzle (Stoke on Trent)
- It’s not relaxing … I have a boogey to the music (Stoke on Trent)
- I get really claustrophobic because it’s like tiny (Solihull)
- You hear it creaking and you think I’m going to fall through the glass any minute! (Stoke on Trent)
- You just lie there for four or five minutes, like – there’s nothing to worry about (Brighton)
- Not a very fulfilling or exciting experience! (Bushey)
- I just get scared because I think what if it locks (Liverpool)
- I usually feel scared and anxious (Stoke on Trent)
Payment and prices

Different arrangements for payment…

- For many, a ‘token’ system:
  - buy tokens at reception, according to number of minutes required; feed in at booth
  - sometimes a machine to buy tokens
- Some have ‘membership’ cards which carry value; may buy tokens (eg from machine) with these
- Some pay money at reception, which then controls bed (allowing 5 mins for user to undress, etc)
- ‘Unmanned’ booth just accepted coins for number of minutes requested

Most, but not all, payment does require interaction with a human being
Costs

- Many don’t work out ‘per minute’ cost
- Exception being some more expensive places where £1 a minute (mainly Brighton, plus Solihull gyms)
- **Typically quoted** were:
  - At lower end £1 for 4 mins; £3 for 9 mins; £3 for 6 mins
  - ...up to £6 for 10 mins; £4.50 for 5 mins; £3 for 4 mins
- Cheaper deals sometimes available via winter rates, 10am-2pm offers, and in Newcastle block bookings: **£10 for 65 mins**
- South noticeably more expensive than Midlands/North
- Stand ups quoted as pricier than lie downs in Newcastle – but not everywhere

Sunbeds range from 15p to £1 a minute
Payment and prices\(^{(3)}\)

**Costs (contd)**

- Sometimes membership makes minutes cheaper
- But outlets not compared very rigorously on price
- **Not felt to be expensive** overall – although a few said would go more if had more money
- Most pay out of their ‘change’ in purse; lunch money; done on piecemeal basis….equivalent to magazine or snack
- Some mums pay – either ad hoc, or buy block booking

Sunbeds are not budgeted for – girls just use their small change
Some evidence of careful thought given to number of minutes

**Time on sunbeds**

**Many start on 3-4 mins**

6 mins = typical session for many

- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

**Typically…**

- First timers
- Fairer skins
- First time back after a break
- Bushey (+ some Stoke & Solihull)

**For most, 10 mins = absolute maximum**

- 9
- 10
- ..12
- ..15

**Typically…**

- More frequent/regular users
- Have built up base tan
- Some darker skinned
- Lower wattage outlets?
- More in Newcastle, Liverpool, and some Brighton girls

**Some places offer just 3, 6 or 9 mins**

One offered in 5 min blocks

**A few have done/heard of others doing 12+…**

For most, 10 mins = absolute maximum

- 9
- 10
- ..12
- ..15

**Typically…**

- More frequent/regular users
- Have built up base tan
- Some darker skinned
- Lower wattage outlets?
- More in Newcastle, Liverpool, and some Brighton girls
Time on sunbeds

‘Minutes’ are at the heart of sunbed usage

- Herein lies the perceived ‘expertise’ (of staff, and experienced users)
- …‘minutes’ recommendations are taken as sign of care/sense/knowledge
- ‘Assessment’ of skin type (where it happens) ‘leads to’ a ‘x’ minutes recommendation
- ‘Supervision’ (see later) assumed to relate to minutes

Many feel consideration given to minutes equates to ‘sensible use’
Time on sunbeds

How are minutes decided upon?

- Typically minutes are asked for – and granted (no questions asked)
  - First time users will have sister/mother etc dictating
  - Later, minutes are increased – up to a point
- Sometimes there is some ‘checking’, esp if 9+ requested
  - May be quite cursory: ‘how many did you have last time?’
- Busy outlet/new tubes can mean a hotter experience for same minutes bought
- A few outlets have ceiling on number of minutes per person per day
  - ….though occasional mentions of having got round this
- …but most users **have found their own limit**
- (sometimes through unpleasant hot/burning experiences)

Most have (now) found their own limitations; a few try to push the boundaries
Time on sunbeds

Experiences of burning?

- Around one per group usually had personal burning or ‘too hot’ story
  - I’ve burnt when I’ve been on twice in a day (Liverpool)
  - I went on for 8 minutes ... never again because I was bright red and it really hurt (Solihull)
  - I burnt my boobs once, when I went on for 9 (Brighton)
  - I went on for 10 once – it was really hot! I got off after 9... (Bushey)

- And more had tales of others who had burnt
  - My sister went on for 10 minutes – she’s got really good skin, but she came off all red and tender.. (Newcastle)
  - She went on for 28 minutes [3 times in one day] ... she got the shakes the day after, had really bad sunstroke and had to stay in bed. (Liverpool)
  - D’you remember Angel [friend]? She was well burnt – red, and blisters too. It was her first time and she went on too long (Brighton)

- Attitude generally was: older and wiser now; superior to those who had burnt
  - Such examples of ‘overdoing it’, make them feel (now) more sensible

Burning is a known possibility – which most feel they’ve ‘grown out of’
Health and safety information in salons

- Most salons have ‘some’ H&S information
  - Typically a notice (often inconspicuous) on cubicle wall
    - About general risks and/or rules
    - Sometimes relating to cautions re fair skins/no. of minutes
    - ...and/or about wearing goggles
    - Occasionally including the words skin cancer

- Sometimes vague awareness of posters/leaflets at Reception (none had read)

- No awareness/mention of ‘Health and Safety Executive Guidance’

- One group made specific point that if they were told verbally about risks it would have more impact
Supervision in sunbed outlets

- Some inclined to question what ‘supervision’ was necessary
  - sunbed session = a simple procedure, once you’ve done it once

- …while at other end of the spectrum, some girls have the desire to feel they are in safe hands
  - and like even minimal evidence of ‘supervision’

Differing views as to how important ‘supervision’ is
## Supervision in sunbed outlets

On balance, there was broad agreement about what supervision consisted of:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checking age/assessing skin type/recommending minutes</th>
<th>‘Something to sign’ at beginning (relating to rules/risks)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H &amp; S information on the wall</td>
<td>Clear explanation how to use first time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an emergency stop button</td>
<td>Mandatory offering of/telling you to wear goggles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping records; continuing to keep check on number of sessions/minutes</td>
<td>High standards of hygiene; keeping machines fit for purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Supervision’ covers a number of aspects of the outlet.
Supervision in sunbed outlets

Some users (more educated/using sunbeds more judiciously) definitely approve of ‘supervision’

- Defend their own outlets in some cases
- Like the aspects of ‘service’ supervision implied…
- Feel safer
- …but in truth haven’t read rules/risks in detail

Others pay lip service to ‘supervision’ being desirable – but collude wholeheartedly in it being absent

- Lie about their age (some used fake or borrowed ID – to up age to 16 or 18)
- May have lied about minutes spent
- Don’t wear goggles
- Go on more frequently than should
- Generally enjoy not being hindered in their usage
- etc

Some are happy to take advantage of lack of supervision
Supervision in sunbed outlets

Overall, supervision very variable across the outlets, but with majority appearing to lack it

Typically reported:

- Not asking age, or asking, but accepting answer at face value
- No discussion of skin type
- Not keeping records; little or no interest in previous no. of sessions/minutes
- Not insisting on goggles being worn
- Not explaining any health risks – beyond (usually unread) small print on a form
- (NB form signing generally a swift, box-ticking process)
- Info on wall very recessive (vs big pictures of attractive tanned people)

And some reports of

- Nothing at all to sign or read
- Turning a blind eye to users returning on same day
- No human contact of any kind (pavement suntan booth)

Majority of sunbed outlets lack supervision to a large extent
Supervision in sunbed outlets

Why the lack of supervision?

- Although a few were more computerised (some recently), and some were part of a bigger operation…

- …there was a general sense of individual businesses, in many cases, with laws unto themselves

- The laxness often appreciated/an ‘attraction’, even though notionally disapproved of

- Impressions of the staff:
  - Pro what they sell
  - Most are tanned
  - Many are young
  - Some are friendly/part of the place; some bored/not interested
  - Some are foreign/hard to communicate with
  - Sometimes a high staff turnover

Both friendly/‘known’ staff, and impersonal/uninterested staff contribute to lax rules
Supervision in sunbed outlets

**Least supervised**
- Unmanned
- Hotel
- Hairdressers

**Majority of outlets**
- Nail bar/tanning
- Larger dedicated tanning salons
- ‘Average’ tanning salons

**Most supervised**
- Beauty salons proper
- Leisure centres/gyms
- Hotel
- Hairdressers
- Other establishments where sunbed ‘tacked on’

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- No rules
- No sense of anyone checking anything
- Or even showing new user the ropes
- Impression of ‘take the money’
- Uninterested girl at counter
- Simply accept older companion as ‘passport’
- Or - cursory checks
  - eg ‘are you 16?’ ‘do you tan easily?’ ‘do you have parent’s permission?’ allowing a sister to sign
- Briefest of checks on minutes
  - ‘how many did you have last time?’
  - Take a lot on trust
  - Goggles present but unsatisfactory
- Overall sense of professionalism and responsibility
- Check age with ID
- Point out health risks
- Skin assessment
- Keep records
- Limit minutes
- Push goggles/show how to use
- May actively deter greater usage of beds
Examples of the two extremes of supervision

**Unmanned booth in South Shields**
- Attracted respondent + friend aged 15
- Purported to check skin type (hand under machine) – everyone came out ‘type 2’, with max no. of mins
- Quite clean/hygienic, but users scared of automatic door opening during (or not opening at end)
- Cheap - around £2 for 10 mins
- Asked/paid for 10 mins, though heat turned off after 6 mins

**Well-supervised ‘Koffee Brown’ in Stoke**
- Users in both groups
- Pleasant place to go and spend time
  - Good music & comfy sofas
  - Refreshments & magazines
  - Relaxed, sociable atmosphere
  - Clean
- Known for strong stand up sunbeds - recently redone
- Friendly staff; sense of care
- Records kept; advice on minutes & products

*My friend said – oh, shall we try them out – and she knew this place where it’s just a machine and no-one worked there…. Because we were like 15, so weren’t really supposed to be going…you just walk in and put your money in…*

*Where people wait there’s a sign on the wall saying that the boss is health and safety checked, and she’s got first aid checks*
I've gone in my school uniform but I was fine and I was only 14 (Liverpool)

I thought I'd have to fill out a card, and I'd planned an age and date of birth and so on – but they didn't ask me (Newcastle)

A lot of places don't ask about your age (Stoke on Trent)

I think they're just bothered about the money... and they're under age too! (Newcastle)

I've gone in my school uniform but I was fine and I was only 14 (Liverpool)

They didn't ask [age] because we went with my friend's sister (Bushey)

I just walked in and she was like 'have you got your coins for the machine' and that was that (Stoke on Trent)

The two [at the gym] that said to me 'do you want to try it?'; they hadn't even used it themselves ... I was like 'what do I do?' (Solihull)

I think it's because they're not really a big business ... they're not really strict or anything (Bushey)

It lists loads of things - if you are fair, got red hair, under 16, whether people in your family have had cancer and stuff (Liverpool)

We were 15 – they asked us why we wanted it, then let us in for 4 or 6 minutes (Stoke on Trent)

At our place there's a thing on the wall saying the first time you should do 7 minutes and so on....they didn't seem too bothered (Brighton)

When you're signing up I think there's stuff about how much you should do... (Brighton)

The machine won't give you more than 9 tokens [= 9 minutes] a day (Brighton)

I showed my national insurance card – they were very laid back about it [age] (Bushey)

She's lovely and does advise you. She said you've got fair skin and I wouldn't go on for 9 minutes, they are new tubes (Liverpool)

If you're under 16, you have to have a parent's signature or someone older to say you are allowed (Liverpool)

The first time I went in there I got id'd which is good because you have to be 16 (Stoke on Trent)

There is something saying you should have signed a form and had advice on your skin type (Newcastle)
Sources of credible advice?

- Many trust (want to trust?) the salons themselves
  - In the absence of anyone else?
  - Because there is some vague allusion to risks and rules
  - Or on the circular argument that if they (bother to) give advice, they are by definition a better, more trustworthy salon
- But some do feel they are ‘just out to make money’

- Other sources they would trust
  - Teachers
  - Health professionals (eg dermatologists, GPs)
  - Mum (some)

- Would expect government, NHS and cancer charities all to be ‘against’

- Only one had heard of the Sunbed Association
  - Guessed to be trade body salons join;; do they make the rules?

No single major source of unbiased advice
What rules would they make?

- Majority appear to put ‘parental’ hat on, and would make rules stricter than those encountered
  - Enforce minimum age of 16; demand ID; or ‘parental permission’
  - (Often say 14 year olds ‘shouldn’t be allowed’, or ‘shouldn’t be interested in a tan’ at their age)
  - Give a ‘tutorial’; show how to use, function of cream, etc
  - Perhaps provide sunscreen in the booths
  - Have clear leaflets/verbal information about possible effects; one suggested ‘before and after’ posters of damaged skin
  - Enforce first time 3 mins; never > 3x a week
  - Do proper skin test; recommend minutes carefully
  - Keep and monitor records of individuals

- A very few go in other direction
  - It’s your own choice
  - ‘Why do they have to be so strict about age?’

An unconscious desire from many for greater supervision?

At 14, she shouldn’t be worry about being tanned (Bushey, aged 16)

14 would be young to start getting into that; 14 year olds are easily led (Newcastle, aged 15)

Wish to be personally serviced/cared for
Role of older sisters and mothers

Older Sisters
(own or friends’)
- Potentially highly influential in relation to sunbed usage
- Younger sisters often aspire to older - both in terms of appearance, and pursuits
- Moreover older sister users provide a practical route in
  - Know the outlet/know the ropes
  - Can play ‘guardian’/avoid questions being asked
- …and older sisters have often offered to ‘take’ younger
  - Pleasure in guiding and initiating

Mothers

Encouragers
- Do it themselves
- Some in beauty business
- May ‘share’ their vouchers/mins
- May be ‘careful parent’, advising pre-holiday base tan

Cautioning
- May have used in past
- Some have friends with leathery skin…or worse
- Try to limit daughter’s time (not > 3x a week)
  - …or ‘not until you’re 16’ etc

Discouragers
- Several described as ‘hating’ sunbeds
- Some plead with daughters not to
- Warn about ageing and skin cancer

Older family members can often be the route in to sunbeds
Older sisters and Mothers

**Older sisters**

- My best friend's sister had a tan and she was always going places and stuff...so we asked if we could go with her, and she took us along (Bushey)
- My sister was having it done and said – why don't you come? (Bushey)
- I went because my sister and her friends [aged 17] were going (Newcastle)
- My sister is terrible for them. Even if she is doing nothing, she goes on 3 times a week. She started at school and she just got into the habit now (Liverpool)

**Mothers**

- I don't think she minds as long as I'm not going all the time (Brighton)
- She was fine about it – I went with her, and my sister, for the wedding (Brighton)
- My mum is a hairdresser, she looks nice, has a nice tan ... that's how I got into it (Solihull)
- If mum sees me going on 3 times a week and I'm really red, she will say 'that's enough now' (Liverpool)
- Mum shouts we're damaging our skin and all that crap but I don't listen to her, I go on them anyway (Liverpool)
- She says you're stupid because in 30 years' time, I'll be moaning a lot ... I say I'll deal with it then (Solihull)

- My mum's really against them – she wouldn't give me money for them (Bushey)
- My mum's not happy about them…she wouldn't stop me before a holiday though, because she knows I burn (Bushey)
- My mum's not happy about them...she wouldn't stop me before a holiday though, because she knows I burn (Bushey)
- I respected her wishes and waited till I was 16 (Newcastle)
- She was fine about it – I went with her, and my sister, for the wedding (Brighton)
- My mum’s really against them – she wouldn’t give me money for them (Bushey)
Awareness of health risks

In all groups, skin cancer mentioned spontaneously

- Only a couple of girls actually doubted the link
- The rest all aware that
  - Sunbeds increase the risk of skin cancer and/or
  - Overuse of sunbeds causes skin cancer
- Many made a specific link with UV rays
- A few said there was more publicity about sunbeds and skin cancer

In many groups moles also mentioned

- Can ‘go funny’, or even become cancerous
- Should be ‘checked’
- Shouldn’t go on if have lots?
- ..but (some thought) can cut out, if a problem

Everyone knows there’s a link with skin cancer
Awareness of health risks (2)

- Skin ageing also always referred to
  - Dozens of references to UV skin test
  - A number had seen TV programmes relating to sunbed skin damage
  - Several training to be beauty therapists – had seen specific pictures/films
  - Many knew older women (mum’s friends, friends’ mums, own mum) whose skin demonstrated heavy sunbed use
    - because close to home, possibly of greater relevance

- Pigmentation, white spots, white patches, and thread veins
  - …were also referred to; several (older generation) users reported to have stopped using because of these

Everyone also aware of skin ageing consequences
Awareness of health risks

How do they know about the health risks?

- TV (e.g., Despatches, How to Look Good Naked, Ten Years Younger, Embarrassing Bodies, Jeremy Kyle, other morning progs, etc)
- ...and other media e.g., magazines (no specific mention of SunSmart)
- Mothers
- School projects/science lessons
- Leaflets/posters at school or college
- College courses/training
- Information at sunbed salon

Health risks of sunbeds are well publicised
Personal associations with skin cancer

- 1-2 per group knew (of) someone with skin cancer

- Tended either to be old (grandparents – both sexes), sometimes involving their deaths; but unconnected with sunbeds…

- …or intensive sunbed users, eg
  - Mum’s friend, or friend’s mum; some survived; a couple died
  - A couple of references to peers – no deaths

- One mum’s friend had throat cancer, linked with sunbeds

Instances of skin cancer not unknown to sunbed users
Response to health risks

- 3-4 girls had changed their behaviour, at least in part because of health risk awareness
  - Going on beds less often; may now favour fake tan

- But most have found a way of rationalising their use of sunbeds

  - **Not going on often enough to run risk**
    - It’s only heavy users (‘every day’, ‘half an hour each time’, etc) it happens to (NB media stories back this up to an extent)

  - Lots of people have used them and **not** got skin cancer
    - Wouldn’t be around if so dangerous

  - Scaremongering/sensationalising (as with so much…)
    - Don’t think about ‘in 20 yrs time’ when you’re young
    - ‘You don’t think it’ll happen to you’

  - Skin cancer not **so** bad…can be dealt with
    - Too depressing to listen to (turn off…)

For lots of reasons, ‘it won’t happen to me’
Response to health risks

You all know about the links to skin cancer but it doesn’t actually stop you from going on (Stoke on Trent)

As long as you’re careful and you’re not doing it all the time…you should be all right (Bushey)

If you went on 15 minutes every day for the rest of your life – that would be taking it too far. But twice a week, that's OK (Newcastle)

Most people think of skin cancer being a mole that’s out of shape and you have it removed, it’s not a really serious illness (Stoke on Trent)

I’ve always got on my mind that if you’ve got skin cancer you can get over it quick (Liverpool)

I don’t think you think about - in 20 years time I might have skin cancer (Bushey)

I always think it won’t happen to me (Liverpool)

It’s like – oh it won’t happen to me..or I’ll just go on one more time’…(Brighton)

One of the girls doing Beauty at college won’t use them because of what she’s learnt on her course (Solihull)

Obviously they’re not life-threatening otherwise they wouldn’t be in salons for people to use (Solihull)

We don’t need to be reminded every time we go on the sunbed that we can get skin cancer, that’s highly depressing (Solihull)

There was a programme on TV about a lady who nearly died….I think I turned it off, because I thought it was a bit depressing (Newcastle)

You all know about the links to skin cancer but it doesn’t actually stop you from going on (Stoke on Trent)

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Health benefits of sunbeds?

- Not much discussion
- ...apart from sunbeds’ value in improving skin
- Occasional mention in salons (usually verbally) of sunbeds counteracting depression/lack of confidence, and recommended by psychiatrists/doctors
- ...and heat being good for joints
- No mention of Vitamin D
  - Thought by these respondents to be a property of the sun, not sunbeds

Possible health benefits not an active attraction for most
But a possible justification/rationalisation for a few
Sunbeds in 30 years time?

Mainly divided into

- Will change/modernise
- More technologically advanced
- ‘Something new will have come along’; better solutions
- Stricter rules
- 18+?
- Maybe prompted by an epidemic of young people with skin cancer?

(tiny minority)

- Spray tans will take over?
- Pale will become fashionable again
3. Key insights and Implications
Key insights and implications

- Simple ‘tan seeking’ is only part of sunbed usage; some users are more motivated by wanting to do ‘something’ to counteract looks they dislike; some seem to be responding to fears around an insubstantial identity (tan = a comforting ‘uniform’, or a possible solution for their wish for more ‘definition’?)

- The ‘visit’ to sunbeds can itself be an attraction; it constitutes an antidote to boredom and confers a sense of grown-up ness

- Some of the more sporadic boredom-prompted use of sunbeds does not really deliver on a tan

- The actual experience also has many inherent discomforts
Key insights and implications

- Fake tan has its place, but is by no means an answer for all
- Patterns of usage vary, with only a minority visiting regularly throughout the year
- Many limit their minutes – while also knowing of cases where people have been more reckless in this respect
- Most thus have the option of making a comfortable comparison of themselves with others, and seeing themselves as not most at risk
Key insights and implications

- Sunbed outlets vary considerably in their levels of supervision, though **the majority have relatively little**

- The most supervised are larger tanning/beauty salons; the least are where sunbeds are ‘tacked on’ to another establishment

- Key areas of rule bending, or lack of rules, are around age of user, number of minutes, use of eye protection, record keeping, and communicating H&S information

- Many of the girls themselves collude with the laxness, flouting what rules there are, and not bothering to read H&S guidance

- But there is evidence many users would like to feel in safe hands, and would appreciate the ‘service’ aspect of supervision
Key insights and implications

- A two pronged approach to ‘change’ in relation to use of unsupervised outlets is needed:
  - Tightening/enforcing industry regulations
  - Messaging the girls themselves
Key insights and implications

- Older sisters and mothers play a critical part in introducing girls to sunbeds
- All users are aware of a link between sunbeds and skin cancer
- But they have a number of ways of rationalising their behaviour in spite of it
- Most sunbed users simply feel the gains far outweigh the (small) risk
Together we will beat cancer