



Men, outdoor workers and sun protection

Summary findings of qualitative investigations of attitudes towards the sun, sun protection and skin cancer among men, with a focus on outdoor workers.

1. Background Methods and Sample

In 2005 Cancer Research UK commissioned Crystal to conduct qualitative research among men (20-50 years), with a focus on outdoor workers, to investigate their attitudes towards the sun, sun protection and skin cancer.

For breadth and depth of results, a multi-faceted research approach was used incorporating:

1. **Male group discussions:**
 - 1 x male outdoor workers (20-35 years, no children, southern)
 - 1 x male outdoor workers (35-50 years, children <16, northern)
 - 1 x male ABC1s (20-35 years, no children, taken sun holiday in < 2 years ago, northern)
 - 1 x male ABC1s (35-50 years, children <16, taken sun holiday < 2 years ago, southern)
2. **In-depth interviews with key workers:**
 - 2 x male Foremen (30-50 years)
 - 2 x male HSE reps (30-50 years)
 - 2 x male Managers (30-50 years)
3. **On-line interviews:**
 - 20 x male outdoor workers (20-35 years, no children)
 - 20 x male outdoor workers (35-50 years, children <16)

Findings and recommendations contained in this report are derived solely from this investigation.

2. Conclusions

- There is a considerable amount of ignorance and confusion relating to protection in the sun amongst outdoor workers, and men generally.
- Whilst lip-service is paid to it in some ways when asked to consider it, clearly little is being done to change behaviour and the vast majority see it as an issue that is not pertinent to them.
- A campaign aimed at this target market needs to be blunt because so many barriers to action – it must break through entrenched misconceptions and arrest attention.
- To be effective it should present the problem (detection rather than prevention) and arouse the fear – only this will break through the ignorance and complacency.
- A detection oriented route has the potential to generate an appreciation of the need to protect, whereas in the current climate a protection route is less likely to instigate men to consider early detection; it also is more easily dismissed

3. Summary of findings

3.1 General Cancer Awareness and Understanding

Across the sample there was mixed awareness and understanding of the personal risk of cancer and respondents tended to fall into three broad camps:

- I. Fatalists (minority): *“If you’re going to get cancer you’re going to get it.”*
- II. Ostriches (majority): These respondents wanted to avoid confronting the issue of cancer and tended to see it as not affecting them. *“It’s not something that I like to think about.”*

- III. Realists (small minority): These respondents were relatively well-informed about cancer and the general risk factors and many had considered their own lifestyles or even altered their behaviour.

3.2 Skin Cancer Specifically

The 'Fatalist' & 'Ostrich' respondents did not see skin cancer as an issue that was pertinent to them at all and had never considered it. "...not something I've ever thought about."

They were also a very sceptical about the link between the sun and melanomas.

'Realists' were rather well-informed and theoretically on board with the messages relating to skin cancer and also the risk factors (i.e. the sun and burning) as well as actively taking care in the sun. "You're generally more aware of it than 10 years ago."

In general:

- Those with children were very aware of skin cancer and the danger posed to young children and many were very careful in relation to their offspring – or at least their wives were. "The kids...you are very aware of them not getting burnt...more delicate skin."
- In addition to children there was a perception amongst many that women were at more risk than men of contracting and dying from skin cancer – the active pursuit of the sun tan and sunbed use. "Women, because they go sunbedding (sic), are more likely to get it."
- There was broad awareness that lighter skinned, fairer haired people and those susceptible to moles/freckles were more at risk. "If you're fair skinned you have to watch out."

3.3 Awareness of the Sun

The 'Fatalists' and 'Ostriches' imagined that the weather in the UK was never sufficiently hot or sunny to increase the skin cancer risk factor once they had been told about the role of exposure to sun/UV to the skin cancer risk factor.

"We don't get the sun often enough, just now and again."

Extending this, cloudy weather was seen by the majority to take away the risk. Thus, it was not a priority issue for the majority.

"I don't really see living in the UK as a real threat."

"It's too cloudy and it never hot enough"

3.4 Risks for Outdoor Workers

When asked 'As an outdoor worker how do you see your risk of developing skin cancer?'

- 0% saw the skin cancer risk to outdoor workers as 'Very High'.
- Equal numbers saw it as 'Quite High'/'Quite Low' suggesting confusion and lack of awareness.
- 25% of sample 'didn't know'

3.5 Use of the UV Index

Respondents were asked, 'What is your understanding of the UV Index? What does it mean to you?'

There was limited understanding on the use of the UV index in the sample. Comments included:

- "10 being the highest rate of catching cancer and 1 being the lowest"
- "no idea"
- "Never heard of it personally"
- "Strength of the UV rays from the sun"

3.6 Sun Protection

There was varying understanding of what constitutes sun protection – from a vague sense of applying a sun lotion every now and then, to covering up and keeping in the shade.

When discussed as a group, respondents were able to cite the following:

- Cover up – wear a t-shirt, hat
- Apply sun cream – ideally factor 30+ (though some confusion about factor ratings and consistency across products and brands; also mixed messages with brands that indicate lowering the factor to increase the tan as skin becomes accustomed to the sun)
- Stay in the shade (assumed to be around mid-day for a couple of hours)

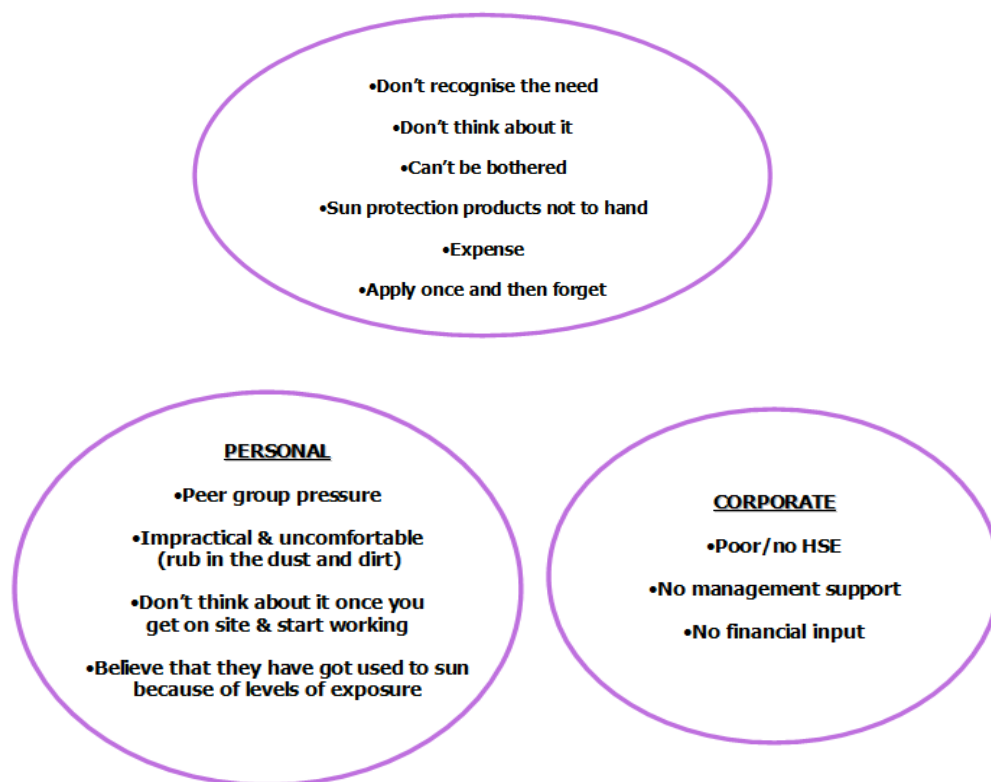
Across the whole sample and typologies, even amongst the most aware, there was inertia (and ignorance) of the need to protect oneself from the sun and its rays. *“I put cream on first thing but not at the back of my neck and I never reapply.”*

This was exacerbated by a belief that cloud, moving around (as opposed to lying in the sun) and cool temperatures on bright days all counteracted any damaging effects of the sun. *“I take my shirt off if I’m gardening and I don’t put cream on. I’m moving around so I don’t see how I can burn.”*

At best the men would use suntan products and cover up on holiday abroad when they had more time, inclination and also their partners’ persuasion. *“I do it when I’m on holiday but you have the time then.”* *“When we’re abroad the wife will remind me and then I do it.”*

In England, few were taking sun protection seriously if they had considered it at all; and those that were admitted to doing so only sporadically and sometimes only on specific areas e.g. head if balding.

Barriers to sun protection included:



3.7 Outdoor Workers & Sun Protection - Worker/Management Issues

The Outdoor Workers fell into three main camps and this had an impact upon how they saw the issue of sun protection at work.

1. Employees of large, well-structured organisations

- Some had been told by management about sun safety and recognised that it was part of company HSE.
- Most were ready to embrace any changes in practice if practical and initiated and financed by management, such as provision of sunscreen, hard-hat neck covers, cover-up mandates (many working on dusty sites do so anyway to minimise skin exposure to dust and dirt). *“I’d certainly take it up but you want it to be supported by management and then you follow it through.”*
- Some management talked about strategies that they had implemented (e.g. Tewkesbury County Council) but there was nothing widespread.

2. Employees of smaller, informally organised companies (e.g. small building businesses and scaffolding companies)

- These organisations seemed to be very haphazard regarding HSE generally. *“Our bosses don’t think about it. I suppose they are a small concern and it’s not a priority to them.”*
- The macho culture, which is prevalent across the majority of the outdoor worker sector, is allowed to flourish in such environments where there is little/no senior control. *“It’s man’s work...”*

3. Self-employed sub-contracted individuals (e.g. couriers, builders, roofers)

- These individuals, even if working for a large organisation, were responsible for their own welfare. *“I’m basically sub-contracted out and I’m my own boss even though I’m working for a big company. I have to take responsibility for myself.”*
- They recognised that any external messages (if presented in a compelling and engaging manner) could be disseminated within the workplace and that they might be receptive to them.
- However they knew that it was largely up to them as individuals to ensure their own safety and well-being and that management was generally laissez-faire. *“...it’s up to me...you have to convince me because it’s me who is responsible.”*

3.8 Early Detection

With the exception of those who had had a personal skin cancer worry or experience, few were regularly, if at all, checking their skin or moles for changes. *“I had a mole removed so I do keep a careful eye on things.”*

There was also uncertainty amongst many as what to look for, the most common assumption being bleeding moles. *“...I suppose if it was bleeding I would take note...”*

The more informed (*a very small minority – 4 across the total sample*) also talked of:

- Moles changing shape
- Moles changing colour (reddening, darkening)
- Irritating/itchy moles
- Ragged outer to moles
- New growths

If there was any unusual activity the ‘ostriches’ claimed that they would wait until the problem was really quite bad and then tell their partner who would pack them off to the GP; others divided between those who would go the GP immediately and others (the vast majority) who keep an eye on the area, tell their partner and see the GP with a little persuasion from their partner.

When asked, ‘Do you check moles/your skin for changes?’ a quarter of Outdoor Workers

said that they 'never check their skin' for changes and nearly three quarters said they only did so occasionally¹.

Comments included:

- *"...wouldn't know what to look for."*
- *"I didn't realise it was something that you should do."*
- *"I have a look now and then but not that often...hardly ever actually."*

¹ Occasionally was self defined and so could be hardly ever