

Attitudes and behaviours regarding sun exposure of Australian Population

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INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVE

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is the leading cause of skin cancer in Australia. The aim of this study was to aims to investigate the level of awareness on the risks related to sun exposure, attitude towards sun protection and sun protection behaviour in Australian Population.

MATERIAL & METHODS

A representative sample of the Australian population over the age of 16 was selected using the quota method.

The questionnaire gathered information about the subject' demographic and socio-demographic profiles. Each were asked to specify the times of exposure to the sun, the notion of knowledge of the recommendations of the public health experts who advise against exposure between 11 am & 4 pm, the reasons for which they were exposed to the sun at these times and the use or not of sun protection products. It was asked to specify the motivations given by the users and the justifications delivered by the non-users of sun protection products.

RESULTS

A population of 2000 was identified, including 994 (49.8%) males and 1006(50.2%) females, respectively (mean age 44.04+/-16.87. (16-88 years). 42.6% reported sun exposure in the morning before 11 am, and 31.1% exclusively after 4 pm. 1084 (54.2%) respondents reported that they were exposed to the sun between 11 am & 4 pm. The most frequent reason for this risk behaviour was that it corresponded to the most convenient hours for their activities (38.5%), those when they were available (24.9%) and 13.7% said these were the most pleasant hours. Only 1.7% say they don't believe prevention messages! Age less than 40 years is associated with a risk of exposure between 11 am and 4 pm (60.0% vs. 49.4%, p:0,0004) but not gender (Male 55.5% vs. Female 52.9%, p:0.23). 65.4% of the respondents declared being aware of public health experts' recommendations against exposure between 11 am and 4 pm. Respondents who exposed themselves between 11:00 am and 4:00 pm were as well informed of these recommendations as other patients (65.4% vs. 65.4%, p> 0,9). Among respondents who say they have been exposed to the respondents, 1137/1639 (69.4%) used sunscreen products during the sunniest period (26.8% [n=440] every two hours). The motivation of those who use sun protection products is mainly the wish to limit the acceleration of skin aging (43.5%) and to reduce the risk of skin cancer (55.5%) (table 1). Even so, 15.7 % admit to using Sunscreen to spend more time in the sun. On the other hand, among those who say they expose themselves, 502 individuals (30.6%) replied that they do not apply sun protection products and 697 (42.5%) that they do not apply sun cream as recommended. They explain their behaviour by the fact that they do not think about it (49.7%), they find it tedious (28.4%). While 15% find the products too expensive, 12.1% think it's not useful!

DISCUSSION

Our study evaluates both sun exposure risk behaviours and sunscreen use in an Australian population. Despite widespread dissemination of public health messages about the importance of sun protection almost 54.2% of Australian adults do not protect themselves from sun exposure between 11 am & 4 pm. It is interesting to note that these high-risk skin cancer patients were as well informed about sun protection recommendations as other patients. This suggests the need for an additional education program among these high-risk skin cancer patients to change their behaviour. Only 26.8% used sun protection products every 2 hours during the sunniest time. We have highlighted that the motivation of those who apply sunscreen products is not only the desire to avoid sunburn and to protect themselves from the risk of skin cancer. Our study reported that patients do not apply sunscreen products most often because they do not think about it, It is important to pursue an effective education policy on the effective use of sun protection. More targeted methods should be developed to prevent skin cancer.

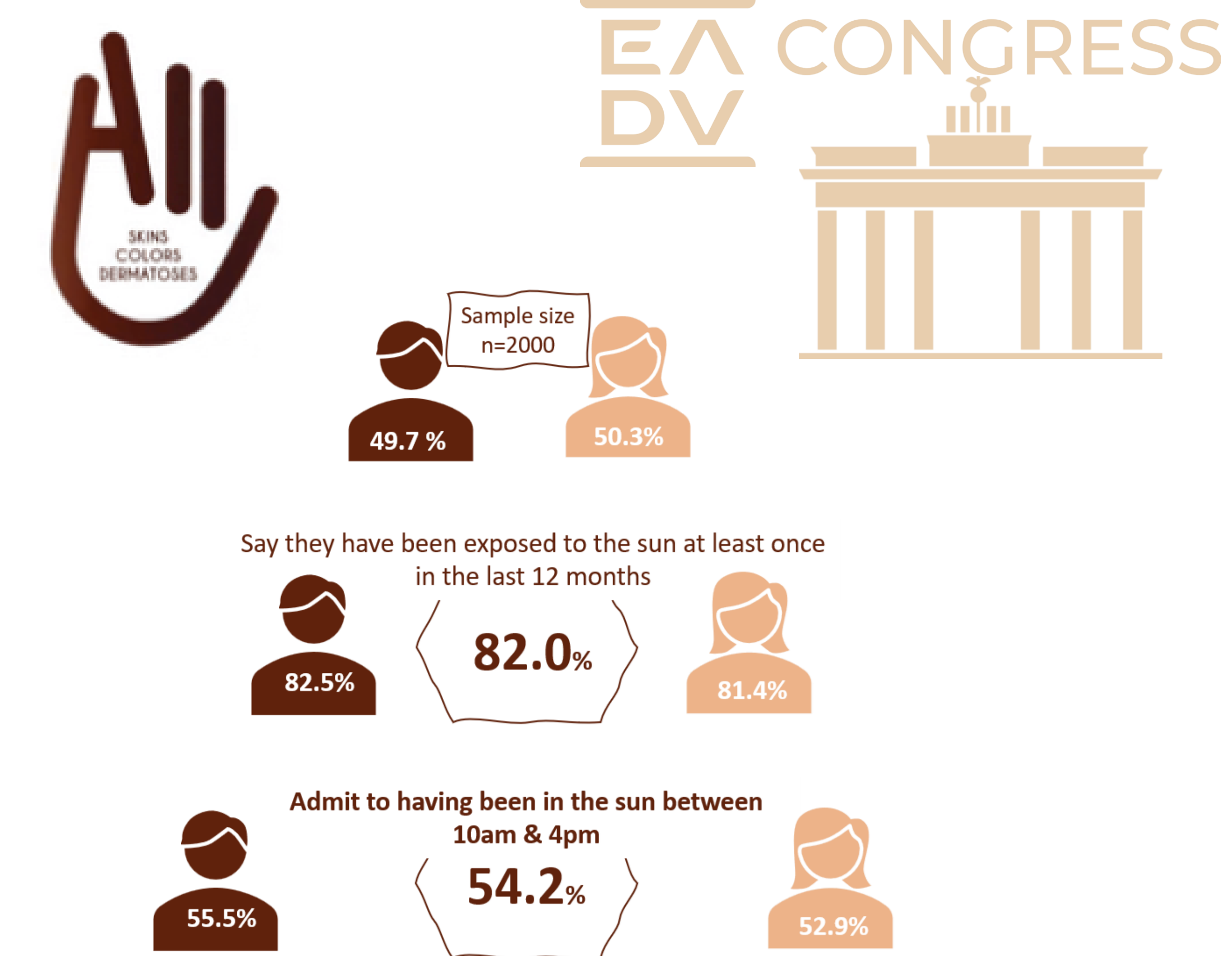


Figure 1 : Why are public health messages not respected ?

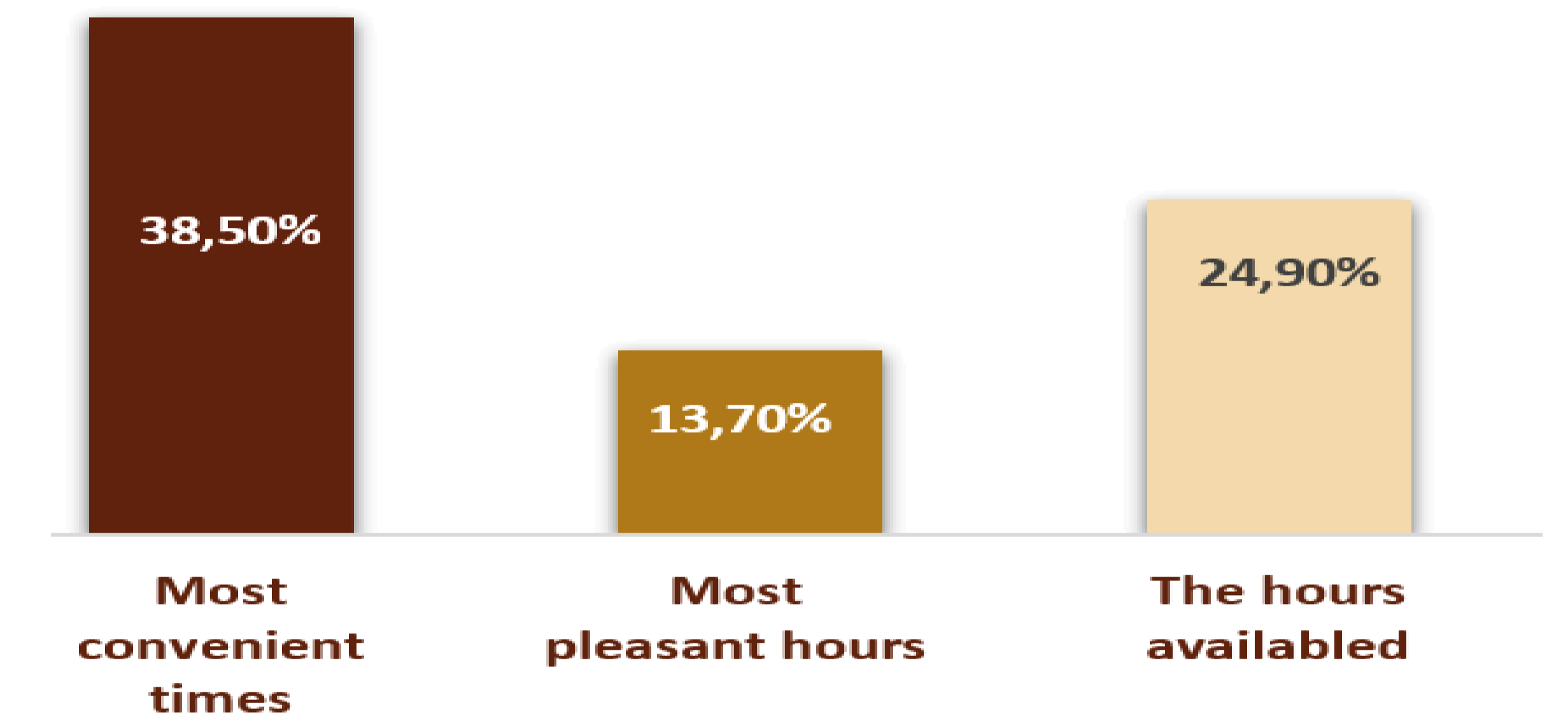


Table 1 Motivations of users and justifications of non-users of sun protection products

	Motivation	N	%
Rationale for respondents who use sunscreen products N = 1137	To avoid sunburn	878	77,2%
	To spend more time in the sun	178	15,7%
	Because of a history of sun burns	294	25,9%
	As protection against accelerated skin aging	495	43,5%
	As protection against the risk of skin tumors	631	55,5%
	For other reason	32	2,8%
Rationale for respondents who do not use sunscreen products as recommended N = 1199	The products are too expensive	180	15,0%
	I don't think about it	596	49,7%
	I don't think it is useful	145	12,1%
	It is too tedious	340	28,4%
	I didn't know about this recommendation	154	12,8%