Dear participants,

In 2008, you participated in a study titled “Sun Protection Behaviour”. This study was conducted as part of a fourth year Honours project by Lorna Hobbs under the supervision of Dr. Winnifred Louis. Thank you very much for participating, we really appreciate it! Below we’ve included a brief summary of the results. If you would like to ask any questions about the research or findings, you can contact Winnifred at w.louis@psy.uq.edu.au . If you are interested in reading other similar studies on decision making, please check out http://www.psy.uq.edu.au/~wlouis.

**Purpose of the study**

The main aim of this study was to examine the role of norms, which are informal standards or rules that guide behaviour, in influencing intentions to use sun protection and reported sun protection behaviour (e.g., wearing sunscreen, hats, sunglasses, etc.).

We used three theoretical models. The “theory of planned behaviour” (Ajzen, 1991) says that people will do a particular behaviour based on three factors: their favourable or unfavourable attitudes towards the behaviour; whether or not they think that important people in the life approve of them doing the behaviour (the ‘subjective norm’); and whether or not they feel they have control over the behavior. “Norm focus theory” (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990) says that two different types of norms are important—descriptive norms (what other people do) and injunctive norms (what other people approve of). Also, the “referent informational influence” model (Terry & Hogg, 1996) says that group level variables need to be measured as they are more important than individual factors (e.g., what other students think and do about sun protection could be more important than what family and non-uni friends do).

As well as looking at the models from past research, we wanted to see if being reminded about failing to use sun protection in the past would influence intentions to use sun protection behaviour. Some research has shown that if you think about how you’ve not lived up to standards you believe in before now, it makes you intend to do better in future. So we ran a study!

**Demographic information about participants**

One hundred and sixty-eight University of Queensland students completed the study in exchange for course credit in undergraduate psychology courses. Participants’ ages ranged from 17 to 50, although the majority were 21 or younger (average age = 19.73). Most participants (79%) were female.

**Predicting Sun Protection Overall**

According to the theory of planned behaviour, favourable attitudes, supportive significant others, and higher perceived control should increase sun protection. We did find that participants who held more positive attitudes towards sun-protection reported greater intentions to engage in sun-protection, and engaged in more actual behaviour. Participants who held more positive attitudes towards sun-protection took more leaflets and sunscreen, in our study. When we looked at what significant others thought and did, there was no effect of injunctive norms (perceiving that significant others approve of sun-protection), but descriptive norms were important (if significant others used sun protection themselves, participants had stronger intentions to do the same). Unexpectedly control wasn’t a factor, though. And we also found some demographic associations, like older participants had higher intentions to use sun-protection, and women had higher intentions than men.
Results of Experimental Manipulations

When participants were told that the majority of UQ students approve of sun-protection, participants reported significantly higher intentions to use sun-protection. But this was only true if people didn’t focus on the absence of actual behaviour among other university students. If participants were told that the majority of UQ students approve of sun protection but don’t actually engage in it themselves, then their own intentions didn’t increase. Also, we didn’t find any effects of the info about other students on behaviour, which was only predicted by participants’ favourable attitudes (as noted above). Finally, we studied the impact of reminding people about past failures to engage in sun-protection, but contrary to expectations there were no effects depending on whether we reminded them or not.

Conclusion and Implications

Overall, the importance of looking at injunctive and descriptive norms together to investigate direct and interactive effects was supported in the present study. In particular, consistent with our own past research, we found that giving positive messages of approval in the context of negative information about a behaviour being uncommon is an ineffective change message, which is something we believe is important to consider. Looking at people’s significant others, it was their sun protection behaviour (descriptive norm) not their approval of sun protection (injunctive norm) which was important in shaping participants’ intentions. In addition, the value of looking at group level norms (e.g., for students) over and above the individualistic norms (e.g., of significant others) was supported in this study.

The results of the study have a number of implications for future intervention campaigns aimed at increasing the use of sun-protection. First, the results suggest that the creation of more positive attitudes towards sun-protection may be important as a first step. Yet many people with positive attitudes fail to act. Second, the results indicate that emphasis should be placed on fostering positive descriptive norms (what people actually do), rather than just relying on injunctive norms (what people should do). In this sense, it’s probably important to target groups for change, instead of individuals, because if individuals are in groups that are failing to act, it can create an inertia that undermines change messages. Relatedly, sun-protection campaigns (and other campaigns) should avoid emphasising negative descriptive norms. We think they do this to raise awareness of the scope of the problem (Australians are at risk of skin cancer) but it could be that emphasising that more and more people are using sun protection is a message that has more positive impact than emphasising that lots of people are still not taking care of their skin.

Thanks again!

Thank you so much for your participation in the study. We really appreciate it!

If you have any questions or comments, please contact Winnifred at the email address supplied above. We would be more than happy to hear from you.

Suggested References: