Use of Sun-Protective Items by Japanese Pedestrians

A Cross-sectional Observational Study

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Objective: To document the prevalence and characteristics of the use of sun-protective items by Japanese pedestrians during the midday hours of summer weekends.

Design: Cross-sectional study.

Setting: Observations were undertaken at 5 locales in central Tokyo on weekends between 11 AM and 2 PM from August 7 through 22, 2010.

Participants: A total of 2338 Japanese pedestrians, from adolescents to senior citizens, were included in the study. Those wearing uniforms and formal attire and individuals of non-Japanese ethnicity were excluded.

Main Outcome Measures: The study examined the prevalence of the use of sun-protective items by pedestrians, including hats, parasols, sunglasses, and gloves/protective sleeves, and its association with demographic factors.

Results: Japanese female pedestrians demonstrated greater use of 1 or more sun-protective items compared with their male counterparts (53.0% vs 30.2%, \( P < .001 \)), with parasols being the most popular item (33.0%). The wearing of sunglasses by pedestrians was low overall (males, 8.5%; females, 6.5%), despite the high UV indices recorded during the observation period. A significant proportion of adolescents and young adults (males, 77.1%; females, 65.1%) did not use any sun-protective items.

Conclusions: The promotion of sun-safety measures, including the use of sun-protective items among Japanese adolescents and young adults, may be warranted. The low use of sunglasses by Japanese pedestrians suggests a need to raise public awareness of UV-related ocular damage.

Arch Dermatol. 2011;147(10):1167-1170

Excessive exposure to ambient UV radiation is a major risk factor for malignant melanoma and nonmelanoma skin cancers. The amount of individual UV radiation exposure is influenced by the level of ambient UV radiation as well as by lifestyle, cultural attitudes, and personal habits regarding sun exposure and sun protection. Observational and questionnaire-based studies assessing sun-protective measures taken by individuals during summertime and in high-risk settings for UV exposure (namely, the beach, schools, and recreational venues) have yielded important information regarding the effectiveness of public health campaigns and highlighted deficiencies in community awareness of sun protection that require further promotion. Most of these studies were conducted in Western countries, with limited information available regarding the sun-protective practices of individuals in Asian countries. Although the incidence of skin cancer is lower in individuals of Asian ethnicity than in the white population, those of Asian ethnicity remain susceptible to the detrimental effects of UV radiation, including cataracts and photoaging. Epidemiologic data suggest that the incidence of melanoma and nonmelanoma skin cancer has risen in Singapore and in Japan. As such, the aim of this study was to monitor the use of sun-protective items in a representative sample of Japanese pedestrians in a major urban center during the midday hours in summer.

METHODS

The study was conducted during the Northern Hemisphere summer from August 7 through 22, 2010, within the 23 wards that constitute Tokyo, Japan. Approval from the Juntendo University Ethics Committee was waived for this study. Eligible participants were Japanese pedestrians; outdoor workers and those wearing uniforms or formal attire were excluded, as were individuals of non-Japanese ethnicity (as identified by appearance and language). In order to obtain a representative sample of Japanese pedestrians, observations were undertaken at 5 locales in central Tokyo on weekends between 11 AM and 2 PM from August 7 through 22, 2010.
Table 1. Number of Japanese Pedestrians Using Sun-Protective Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14-29 y</td>
<td>106 (18.4)</td>
<td>240 (45.8)</td>
<td>346 (12.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-60 y</td>
<td>240 (35)</td>
<td>48 (8.4)</td>
<td>288 (25.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;60 y</td>
<td>57 (9.1)</td>
<td>120 (24.7)</td>
<td>177 (25.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>363 (65.1)</td>
<td>358 (64.4)</td>
<td>721 (11.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.
- Statistically significant (P < .001) for groups aged 14 to 29 years vs aged 30 to 60 years and aged 14 to 29 years vs older than 60 years.
- Statistically significant (P < .001) for groups older than 60 years vs aged 30 to 60 years and older than 60 years vs aged 14 to 29 years.
- Statistically significant (P < .001) compared with males.

Table 2. Different Types of Sun-Protective Items Used by Japanese Pedestrians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parasol</td>
<td>104 (18.4)</td>
<td>240 (45.8)</td>
<td>346 (12.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hat</td>
<td>65 (11.5)</td>
<td>92 (17.6)</td>
<td>157 (25.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunglasses</td>
<td>35 (6.2)</td>
<td>31 (5.9)</td>
<td>66 (10.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloves/protective sleeves</td>
<td>1 (0.2)</td>
<td>17 (3.2)</td>
<td>18 (2.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Each individual may have a different item count.
- Statistically significant (P < .001) compared with males.

 RESULTS

During the observation period, the temperature ranged from 29.7°C (85.5°F) to 34.5°C (94.1°F) and the UV index ranged from 6 to 8. As shown in Table 1, a total of 2338 pedestrians were observed, including 1214 females and 1124 males, with 1055 of them (45.1%) judged to be aged 14 to 29 years, 1009 (43.2%) aged 30 to 60 years, and 274 (11.7%) older than 60 years.

A statistically significant difference was observed in the proportion of female compared with male pedestrians using 1 or more sun-protective items (53.0% vs 30.2%, P < .001) (Table 1). Parasols and hats were the most common sun-protective items for female (33.0%) and male (24.8%) pedestrians, respectively (Table 2). A significant sex difference was observed in the use of parasols (P < .001), but no statistical significance was observed in the use of hats (P = .92) or sunglasses (P = .44). Notably, the wearing of sunglasses was low in female (6.5%) and male (8.5%) pedestrians. A small proportion of the studied population used shade-creating protective items (a parasol or a hat) and sunglasses (2.9%). A small percentage of females (1.9%) wore gloves and/or protective sleeves.

When age groups were examined, it was noted that a significant proportion of adolescent girls and young women did not use any sun-protective items (65.1%); this was statistically significant (P < .001) compared with adult women (35.1%) and female senior citizens (15.2%) (Table 1). In the male subgroups, relatively high numbers of adolescent boys and young men (77.1%) and adult men (72.8%) did not use any sun-protective items; this was statistically significant (P < .001) compared with male senior citizens (36.2%).
The UV index for Tokyo (northern latitude of 35°41') can reach a maximum of 10 during summer. In this study, the UV index estimate for Tokyo during the midday hours corresponded to the high and very high exposure categories. In this setting, Japanese female pedestrians were more likely than their male counterparts to use 1 or more sun-protective items and used parasols as their primary protective item, sunglasses were not commonly worn by pedestrians, and a large proportion of adolescents and young adults did not use any sun-protective items.

The sex difference in sun-protective behavior is consistent with reports in the media and in the anthropological literature of the avoidance of tanning by Japanese women. Information in the medical literature is lacking in this regard; however, a survey of 379 Japanese dermatology outpatients highlighted a significantly greater use of sunscreen in females (57% vs 18%), as well as a greater likelihood of habitual sun exposure in males (31% vs 19%). Of interest, a recent questionnaire-based study conducted in northern China also demonstrated a significant sex difference in sun-protective practices, including a greater use of sunscreen (78% vs 28%) and parasols (65% vs 14%) by females and a larger percentage of males using no sun protection (16% vs 4%).

It has been documented that Asians have a cultural preference for a light complexion and avoid tanning and that Western acculturization of individuals of Asian descent was associated with increased sun-seeking behavior. Unlike in the United States, Australia, or England, where public health campaigns promote sun-safety practices, no such programs exist in Japan, to our knowledge. Thus, the tendency of Japanese females to shield themselves from the sun may be related to cultural and/or cosmetic concerns rather than the specific desire to prevent skin cancer. In contrast to Western society, in which sun-seeking behavior is influenced by the perceived attractiveness of tanned skin, societal values in Japan may influence women to reduce harmful behavior with respect to sun exposure.

Specific observational studies regarding the wearing of sunglasses in public outdoor settings recorded that sunglasses were worn by more than one-third of observed pedestrians using shade-creating protective items and used parasols as their primary protective item, sunglasses were not commonly worn by pedestrians, and a large proportion of adolescents and young adults did not use any sun-protective items.

The advantage of an observational study to monitor sun-protective practices compared with self-report surveys is the direct observation of behavior that is not subject to response or recall bias. However, limitations of this study include its estimation of the age of the participants, the possibility of inclusion of non-Japanese individuals, and an inability to assess other important methods of sun protection, including sunscreen use, type of clothing, and shade-seeking behavior. This study of the use of sun-protective items appears to be biased toward females, since parasols, gloves, and protective sleeves are considered to be traditionally feminine items according to societal norms and, thus, are not commonly used by males. However, it should be noted that participants not using sun-protective items were taken into account, the proportion of which were higher in males compared with females.

A questionnaire-based study would be useful to assess community awareness of the risks of UV radiation, particularly in adolescents and young adults, who exhibited low use of sun-protective items, and to examine the use of sun-protective clothing and sunscreen in this population. Because of the low use of sunglasses, a public education campaign may be warranted to increase awareness of UV-induced ocular damage.


