



## **KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR OF PARENTS OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN ABOUT SUN PROTECTION**

Catherine Black, Jeanne Heitmeyer,  
Kay Grise, and Christine Readdick  
Florida State Univ., Tallahassee, FL 32306

The purpose of the study was to determine sun exposure and sun protection among preschool children attending day care. Clothing and accessories currently worn by preschool children while playing outside were identified including garment type, fabric structure, and fiber content. Parental knowledge, attitudes, and behavior towards sun protection for pre-school children were measured and analyzed. Environmental conditions and demographic variables were examined.

A trained researcher used participant observation to study the sun protective practices of preschool children attending child care centers. Four-year-old children were observed while playing outside at selected child care centers in the southeast. Children's photographs were taken for documentation of these observations and content analysis. In addition, a questionnaire was administered to the parent/guardian of the pre-schooler to measure parental knowledge, attitudes, and perceived behavior about sun protection for the child.

One-hundred children were observed during a two-week time period at nine selected child care centers. Subjects were 73% Caucasian, 23% African-American, 3% Asian American and 1% Hispanic; gender was 48% boys and 52% girls. Children played outside for an average of one hour with an average temperature of 88.4° F and a UV index of 9.

Children were wearing typical summer attire: 82% wore cotton or polyester/cotton shirts with T-shirts being the most popular, 76% wore cotton or polyester/cotton shorts. Cotton was worn by 80% of the children with the majority wearing knitted garments. Only one child had head covering, a baseball hat which gives limited protection from the sun. Results indicate that the apparel donned by preschoolers affords limited sun protection during outdoor play when the sun's UV rays are most harmful; faces, arms, and knees and legs were exposed.

Knowledge, attitudes, and perceived behavior about sun protection for parents of pre-school children were measured through a questionnaire administered to parents. Pearson product moment correlations were used to compare the parental knowledge, attitudes and behavior scores. Overall, there was a strong correlation between parental knowledge and attitudes ( $r = .969, p < .01$ ), parental behavior and knowledge ( $r = .882, p < .01$ ), and parental behavior and attitudes ( $r = .912, p < .01$ ). Parents scored well on the knowledge, attitude, and perceived behavior portions of the questionnaire. They thought it was very important to protect their young children from the sun's UV rays. However, their actual behavior did not match their perceived behavior scores, as parents sent children to school to play in the sunshine without sunscreen and did not provide protective clothing to shield the child's body from the sun's harmful rays.



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Implications for this study are that education is needed for parents and day-care caregivers of young children for sun protection.