

Are adolescents being protected by new sunbed legislation? A national study

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INTRODUCTION

In response to the growing evidence base highlighting the risks associated with sunbed use, the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE) set up a working group to provide advice to the Government on the needs for additional controls. They published a report on health effects and risks of artificial tanning devices in June 2009¹. This concluded that there is evidence to suggest an increased risk of skin cancer amongst those who use sunbeds before the age of 35. Then a few months later the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified sunbeds as carcinogenic to humans². In addition, a prevalence study of underage sunbed use discovered that 6% of 11-17 year olds had used a sunbed³.

These reports alongside a growing evidence base led to the Sunbed (Regulations) Act 2010 being passed in England and Wales. This followed the Public Health etc (Scotland) Act. Both ban under 18s from using sunbeds. In addition, Scotland and Wales have wider regulatory powers.

This research project was commissioned by Cancer Research UK to understand the extent to which the implementation of the new sunbed legislation is prioritised by Local Authorities (LAs) across England, Wales and Scotland.

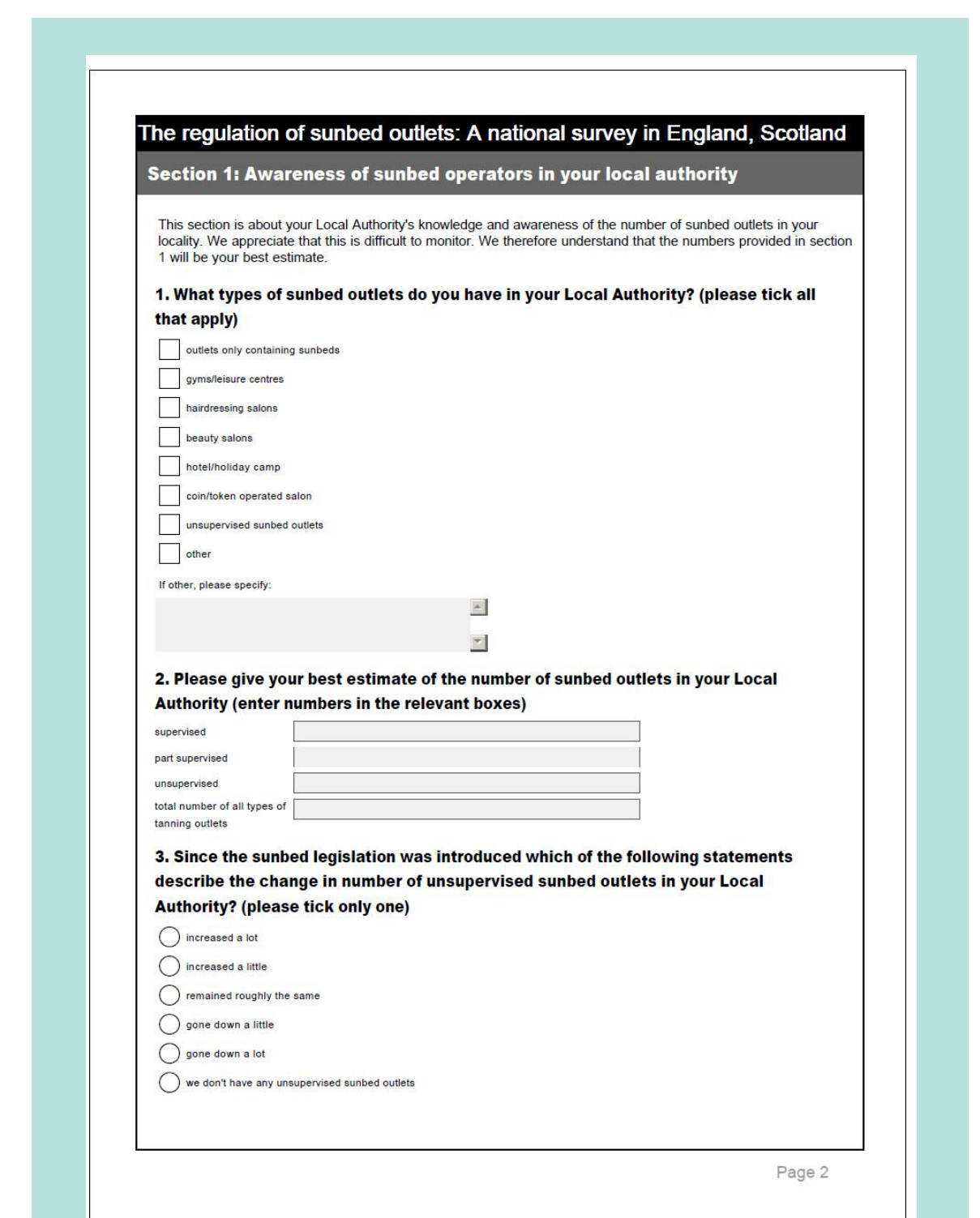
METHODS

A web-based survey questionnaire contained a range of topics covered in five main sections: awareness of sunbed businesses; inspections and other interventions; policy and practice for dealing with complaints and intelligence; staffing and resources available to regulate sunbed outlets; and contact details.

The questionnaire was designed to capture data from Health and Safety and/or Environmental Health Departments located in LAs in England, Scotland and Wales.

Survey Monkey, an online tool, was used both to design the questionnaire and collate the responses. The web questionnaire allowed for a rapid and cost-effective collation of this data.

Data was analysed using SPSS Statistics 21.



The screenshot shows a survey form with the following sections:

- Section 1: Awareness of sunbed operators in your local authority**
 - 1. What types of sunbed outlets do you have in your Local Authority? (please tick all that apply)
 - Adults only sunbeds
 - Children only
 - Mixed
 - Hairdresser only
 - Children operators only
 - Unsupervised outlets
 - Other
 - If other, please specify: _____
- 2. Please give your best estimate of the number of sunbed outlets in your Local Authority (enter numbers in the relevant boxes)
 - Inspected: _____
 - Not inspected: _____
 - Total number of all types of sunbed outlets: _____
- 3. Since the sunbed legislation was introduced which of the following statements describe the change in number of unregulated sunbed outlets in your Local Authority? (please tick only one)
 - Increased a lot
 - Increased a little
 - Stayed roughly the same
 - Went down a little
 - Went down a lot
 - We haven't had any unregulated sunbed outlets

Figure 1: The web-based survey questionnaire: The regulation of the sunbed industry

RESULTS

Most (135, 93.6%) LAs, held intelligence on sunbed outlets. 3,543 outlets were identified, an average of 26 per LA (range 0-301). There was significantly higher sunbed density in urban LAs compared to rural LAs (40% Vs 9.1%; $p < 0.05$).

Few LAs (6, 4.1%) identified unsupervised premises. Most outlet types were identified by both rural and urban LAs, see figure 2. However, sunbed only outlets were more common in urban LAs (97.7% Vs 52.9%, $p < 0.05$).

16.5% of LAs had not undertaken an inspection in the last 12 months. There was no association between inspection activity with population density, sunbed density, staffing and spend on sunbed regulation. However prioritisation of the sunbed regulations and their inclusion on the work programme, were associated with higher inspection activity (60% Vs 27%, $p < 0.05$), see figure 3.

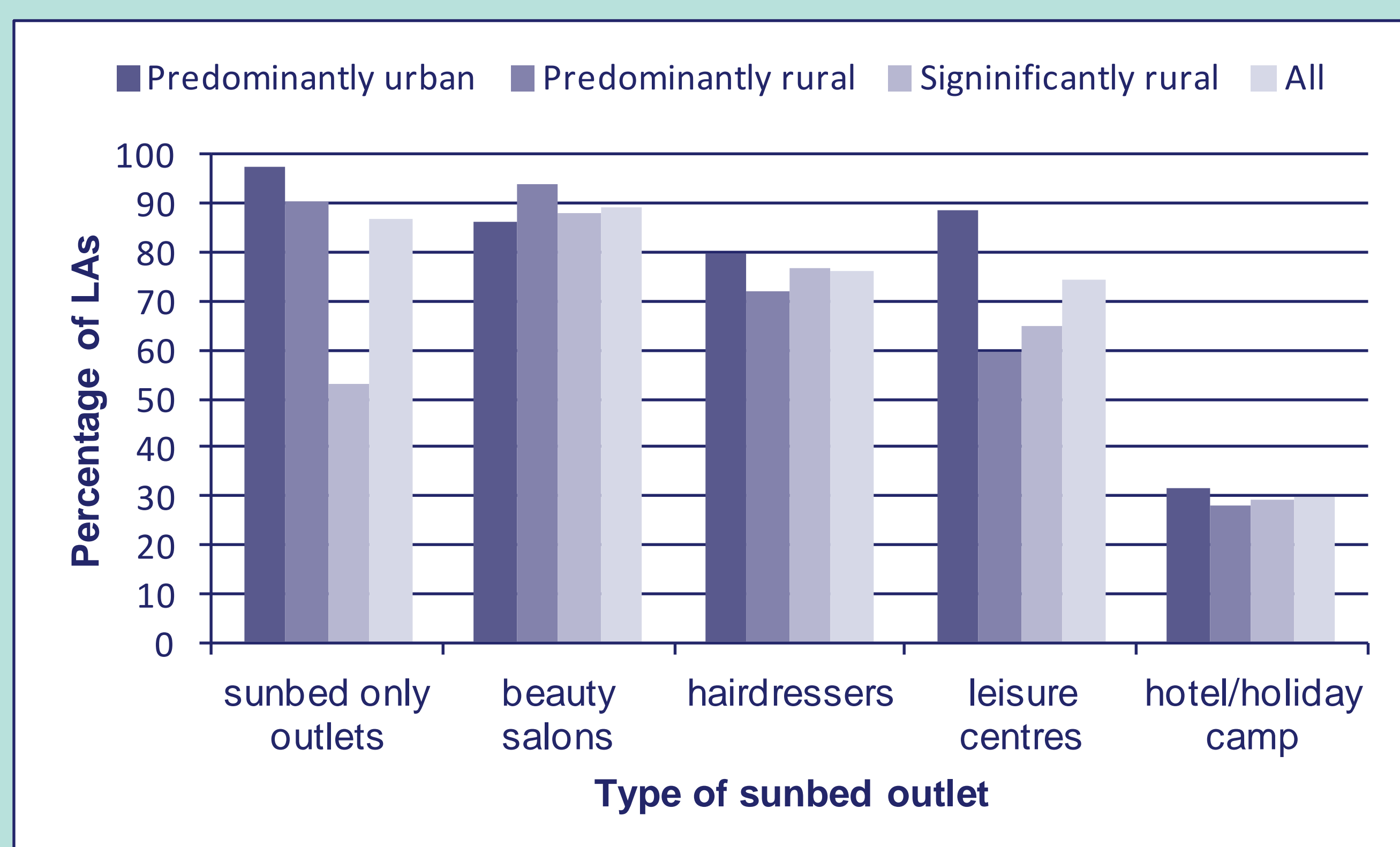


Figure 2: Type of sunbed outlet by population density in 2012

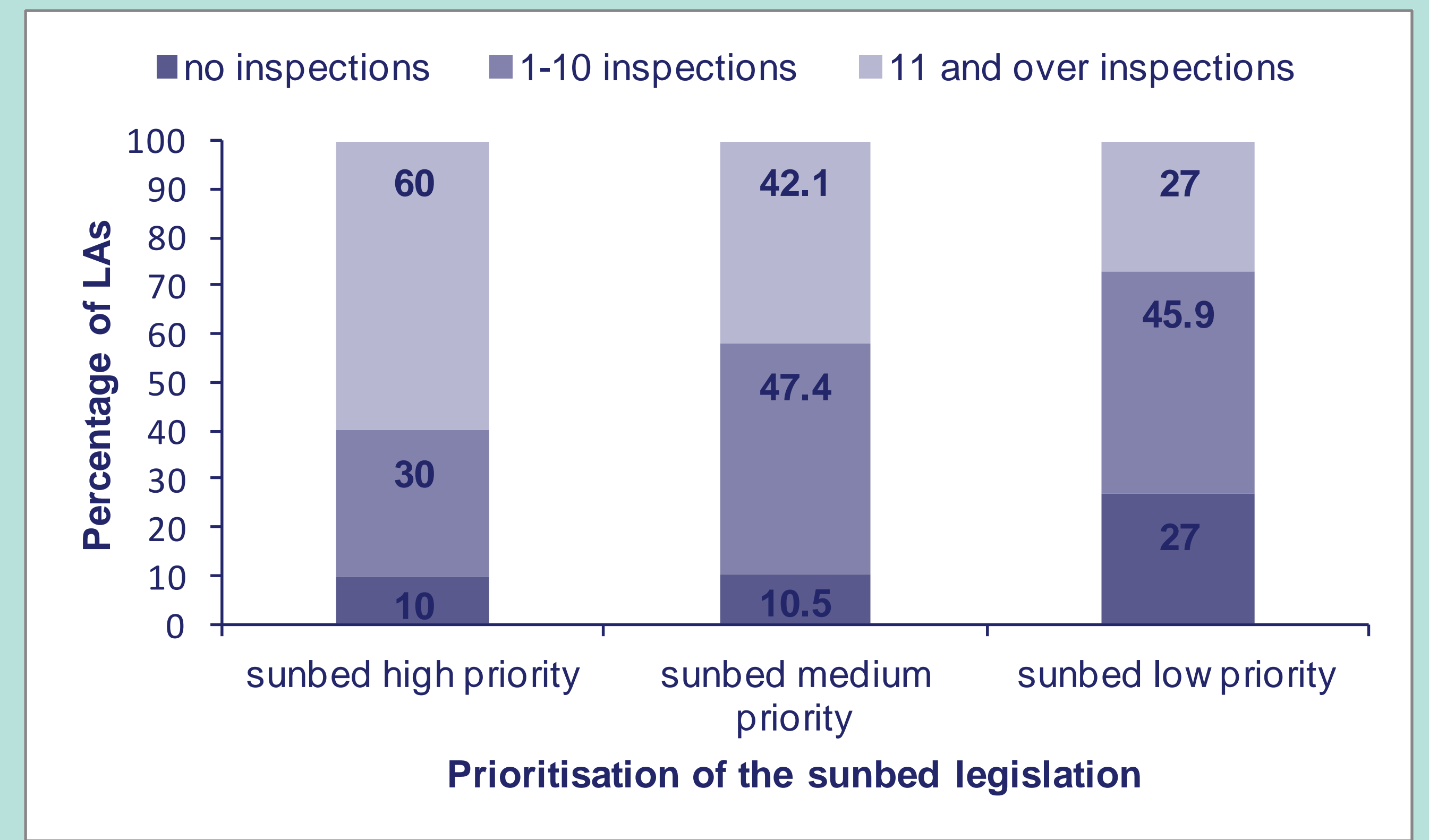


Figure 3: Number of inspections carried out in the last 12 months by whether the sunbed regulations have been prioritised, 2012

CONCLUSIONS

- Inspection activity of sunbed outlets is still low in some LAs, with approximately one fifth of LAs not carrying out these inspections in the previous 12 months
- LAs response to the new sunbed legislation is mixed, and good practice appears to be associated with the level of prioritisation given to this public health issue by LAs

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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