

Study: Can hearing voices be a good thing?

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British psychologists have launched a study to determine why some people who hear voices consider it a good experience, while others find it distressing.

The University of Manchester investigation follows a Dutch study that found many healthy members of the population in that nation regularly hear voices in their heads.

Although hearing voices has traditionally been viewed as abnormal and a symptom of mental illness, the Dutch findings suggest it's more widespread than thought, estimating about 4 percent of the population could be affected.

Manchester Researcher Aylish Campbell said: "We know many members of the general population hear voices, but have never felt the need to access mental health services; some experts even claim that more people hear voices and don't seek psychiatric help than those who do.

"In fact, many of those affected describe their voices as being a positive influence in their lives, comforting or inspiring them as they go about their daily business."

Campbell says the study hopefully will contribute to the development of psychological therapies to help people better understand and cope with their voices.

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