

Seniors with undiagnosed hearing loss can become isolated

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Dr. Paul Mick believes that evidence that links hearing loss to social isolation in seniors deserves further study. Credit: UBC Okanagan

Senior citizens with undiagnosed or untreated hearing problems are more likely to suffer from social isolation and cognitive impairment, a UBC study has found.

UBC Okanagan researchers examined the impact of undiagnosed or untreated hearing issues in seniors aged 60 to 69. The study found that for every 10 decibel (roughly the sound of calm breathing) drop in hearing sensitivity, the odds of [social isolation](#) increased by 52 per cent.

Among the sample of seniors, a ten-decibel reduction of hearing sensitivity was also associated with cognitive declines equivalent to almost four years of chronological aging.

"Hearing loss is often not thought of as a public health issue and as a result there is often not a lot of health care resources that have been put towards testing and hearing support," says Dr. Paul Mick, a physician and clinical assistant professor at UBC's Southern Medical Program. "As social isolation has been shown to have similar impacts on mortality rates as smoking and alcohol consumption, this is something we should examine further at both the system and individual patient level."

Mick's study examined data collected between 1999 and 2010 by the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, a survey that samples 5,000 people each year across the United States. The survey examines demographic, socioeconomic, dietary and health-related issues.

Mick said he would like to expand his research to see if interventions such as a [hearing](#) screening program similar to what is done for young children could positively impact [health](#) outcomes for Canadian seniors.

Mick's study was recently published in the journal *Ear and Hearing*.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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