

Is your partner's hearing loss driving you mad?

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Having to shout to be heard, constantly repeating yourself and competing over the blare of a too-loud TV... living with someone experiencing hearing loss can be exhausting, frustrating and often dispiriting.

And now, new research by academics at the University of Nottingham has suggested that the impact of the condition on those closest to them should be considered when personalising rehabilitation plans for patients with deafness.

The research, published in the journal *Trends in Hearing*, was led by PhD student, Miss Venessa Vas, through the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) Nottingham Biomedical Research Centre (BRC)

Miss Vas said: "This is research which reviews the existing evidence we have on the impact of [hearing](#) loss on those diagnosed with the condition, as well as those around them. Currently there is no cure for hearing loss, so we need to consider ways to help with aspects of life affect by hearing loss, such as those highlighted in this research."

An estimated 300 million people around the world are living with hearing loss, which can affect almost every aspect of daily life leading to isolation, difficulties socialising, low self-esteem and problems in the workplace.

However, hearing loss not only affects the individual but those with whom the person with [hearing impairment](#) communicates on a regular basis - their spouse, siblings, children, friends, relatives, colleagues and carers.

Often, information from these so-called 'communications partners' can be used to get a more accurate picture of the individual's hearing loss and level of resulting disability.

The Nottingham research, funded by the Medical Research Council, reviewed more than 70 previous studies that looked at the complaints made by people with hearing loss and those closest to them to examine the same issue from both perspectives.

The study uncovered common areas causing concern for both those experiencing hearing loss and those living closest to them.

Flashpoint areas included:

The telephone - people with hearing problems reported difficulties with hearing the phone ring or the person speaking at the other end, while their communications partner reported having to take on the role of continually answering the phone or telling their partner when it is ringing

The television and radio - raised volume as a result of hearing loss was reported as an area of conflict

Social life - people with hearing loss spoke of the difficulties of social conversations in noisy environments, while partners reported reduced enjoyment of [social events](#) due to their partner's hearing loss and attending social events alone. This also contributed to the issue of isolation as both parties reported becoming more socially withdrawn as a result of the hearing loss.

Emotions - communications partners reported the burden and stress of having to adjust to their partner's hearing loss as well as the emotional consequences for their relationship. They expressed feelings of guilt and upset in relation to the way they reacted to the hearing loss and their lack of understanding of their partner's difficulties. They also reported finding the effort of communicating particularly draining.

Miss Vas added: "Hearing loss is a chronic condition that affects the

whole family. Yet, to our knowledge, our work represents the first attempt to piece together a picture of the effect of hearing loss from the perspectives of people with hearing loss and their partners.

"Evidence from video-recorded audiology appointments shows that family members have a strong interest in being involved and sharing their experiences of the patient's [hearing loss](#). However, they are typically discounted by the audiologist."

The researchers believe that listening to the views of partners and family during clinical consultations and involving them in future treatment strategies could help to ease the patient's journey through rehabilitation.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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