

Australian tradies exposed to excess noise levels at work, study finds

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Almost one in five Australian working men experienced noise above the recommended occupational limit on their most recent working day, new research led by Curtin University has found.

The research, published in the Occupational and Environment Medicine Journal, surveyed almost 5000 Australian workers to understand how many of them were exposed to [workplace noise](#) and chemicals that can damage hearing including some solvents, metals and gases.

Lead author Mrs Kate Lewkowski, an audiologist from the School of Public Health at Curtin University, said hearing loss affected more than half a billion people worldwide and continued to be a leading cause of disability in Australia.

"Hearing loss can significantly reduce someone's quality of life as it can lead to [social isolation](#) and poor mental health," Mrs Lewkowski said.

"Our survey aimed to determine how many workers are exposed to hazardous workplace noise and ototoxic chemicals in the Australian workplace. We interviewed 5000 workers and found that men were more likely to be exposed to excessive noise and workplace ototoxic chemicals compared to women. This finding is likely due to the gender employment patterns in industries such as construction.

"The findings also show that four out of five workers who exceeded the full noise exposure limit were also likely to be exposed to at least one ototoxic chemical in the workplace. This is an important finding as it demonstrates that most of those who work in hazardous noise environments may have an additional risk of hearing loss due to exposure to these chemicals."

The research also found that younger men who had trade qualifications and worked outside a major city were at higher risk of being exposed to excessive noise levels at work.

Co-author John Curtin Distinguished Professor Lin Fritschi, also from Curtin's School of Public Health, said despite current regulations in

place to reduce workplace noise, high levels of noise continued to exist in many Australian workplaces.

"Our findings have important implications for the Australian workforce and immediate action is needed to reduce the future burden of hearing loss," Professor Fritschi said.

"It is critical for strategies to be developed to reduce workplace noise and [chemical](#) exposure, especially in industries like construction where high levels of exposure currently exists."

The research, funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), was also co-authored by researchers from The University of Western Australia, Monash University, National Acoustic Laboratories in Sydney, The Arctic University of Norway, and University of Montreal.

The [research paper](#) is titled "Exposure to noise and ototoxic chemicals in the Australian workforce."

More information: Exposure to noise and ototoxic chemicals in the Australian workforce. *Occup Environ Med* Published Online First: 25 January 2019. [DOI: 10.1136/oemed-2018-105471](https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2018-105471)

Provided by Curtin University

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